

Know your enemy South - Egypt

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures is used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Today we are continuing with our series 'Know your enemy' in which we look at some of the enemies of ancient Israel in the Old Testament and see what we can learn from this for our Christian pathway today. In this session we will consider an ancient, powerful nation that lay to the southwest of Israel, and is very frequently mentioned in the Bible, namely ancient Egypt.

First of all, let's remind ourselves of two key verses about interpreting the Old Testament. They are Romans chapter 15 verse 4, and Ephesians chapter 6 verse 12. I will read them both from the New King James Version:

Firstly, Romans 15 verse 4:

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

And secondly, Ephesians 6 verse 12:

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Romans 15 verse 4 tells us that the interactions between ancient Israel and ancient Egypt are not just ancient history! They are that, but they are more than that. These things actually happened, but when we read about them, they teach us, by symbol and by illustration, important truths that have a direct bearing on our Christian lives now. As it says, these things "were written for our learning." The English Standard Version helpfully uses the word 'instruction':

"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction."

It's not just learning in the sense of finding out what happened back then, but it is instruction for us to use now.

Ephesians 6 verse 12 tells us that our enemies are not other people nor nations! Our enemies are the "spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places", in other words, Satan and his angels. The literal enemies of ancient Israel serve as illustrations or symbols of the kind of enmity that we face. And we need to remember that we are speaking about ancient Egypt that interacted with

Israel a few thousand years ago. When we speak of Egypt as an illustration or type in the Bible, we are of course not thinking about modern day Egypt.

Now that we have these keys to interpretation in mind, what can we learn from the Bible about ancient Egypt as an enemy of Israel?

A brief overview of some of the interactions between Israel and Egypt in the Old Testament

The first mention of Egypt in the English Bible depends on what version you are using, but in the New King James version it is in Genesis chapter 12 verse 10, when Abraham (still called Abram at that time) went down to Egypt from Canaan:

“Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land.”

You can read about that incident in Genesis chapter 12 verses 10 to 20. It was a bad time for Abraham, because he lied about his wife Sarah, who was very nearly taken as a wife for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Abraham did very well materially out of his time in Egypt.

[Genesis chapter 12 verse 16 tells us that Pharaoh](#)

“Treated Abram well for her [that is, Sarah’s] sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels.”

However, this wealth became a source of contention between him and his nephew Lot as you can read in the very next chapter, Genesis chapter 13. As a result of this, Lot went to live near, and then in, the city of Sodom, which was a city proverbial for its wickedness. So right at the start of the Bible, Egypt is depicted as a place of danger.

Egypt becomes very important in the Old Testament story when we reach Joseph, Abraham’s great-grandson, the favoured son of the twelve sons of Jacob. The story of Joseph is well known. Jacob’s older sons hated Joseph because he was their father’s favourite, and they planned to kill him, but in the end sold him as a slave to some travelling traders, who took him down to Egypt and sold him on there. Joseph found himself in the house of an officer called Potiphar. Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, but Joseph refused, not wanting to sin against God. Potiphar’s wife lied about him and so Joseph was thrown into prison. While there, he correctly interpreted dreams that some other prisoners, Pharaoh’s butler and baker, had had. The butler was restored to his job, as Joseph had predicted. Sadly, the butler forgot about Joseph, but when Pharaoh had a disturbing dream that no one could interpret, the butler remembered Joseph and he was hurriedly brought out of prison.

Joseph was able to interpret Pharaoh’s dream, which was that there would be seven years of plentiful crops, followed by seven years of severe famine. Pharaoh promoted Joseph to the top job, prime minister as we would say. Joseph wisely administered Egypt so that there was plenty of stored food for the famine. During the famine, Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt to buy food, and through a series of divinely orchestrated events, they eventually came to realise who Joseph was, and how guilty they were of their sin against him when they had hated him and sold him into slavery. This led to a wonderful reconciliation between them, with Joseph being a wonderful picture of the grace of the Lord Jesus. Jacob and his family settled in Egypt.

You can read the story of Joseph in Genesis chapters 37 to 50. [Although it is a well-known story, one does not tire of reading it again.](#) The following book of the Old Testament, Exodus, has at the start the ominous words of chapter 1 verse 8:

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.”

What follows is the famous story of how the descendants of Jacob were persecuted and enslaved in Egypt. The king commanded that all Israel's baby boys were to be drowned in the river, but Moses was spared, because his parents did not obey the king's commandment but sent Moses to float on the river in an ark. He was found by Pharaoh's daughter who had gone down to the river to bathe, and she brought him up in the king's palace. Later on, Moses wanted to help his own persecuted and enslaved people, but he did so in the wrong way, and he escaped from Egypt to the deserts of Midian. He was there forty years until he met God in the remarkable incident of the burning bush. God commissioned him to go back to Egypt and take his people out from there.

What follows is the justly famous account of how Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, and the ten plagues that God sent down as a result. At the last plague, we read about the institution of the Passover when the Israelites daubed their houses with the blood of the Passover lamb, which sheltered them from the destroying angel. They then left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, having been driven out by Pharaoh, yet Pharaoh then changed his mind and tried to recapture his former slaves. Pharaoh's army was destroyed in the Red Sea, which the Israelites were able to cross on dry land by God's miraculous intervention, but not the Egyptians. The Israelites then crossed the wilderness to the land of Canaan that had been promised to Abraham and to his descendants. The journey should not have taken long, but amazingly, at the entrance to the Promised Land, the people decided that they wanted to return to Egypt! Consequently, they ended up wandering in the desert for forty years as a judgement, before the next generation eventually entered the Promised Land.

Egypt continues to feature in the Old Testament after that, sometimes as an enemy, sometimes as an untrustworthy and unreliable ally, and as a place to which unfaithful Israelites sometimes wanted to return.

The central importance of the deliverance of the people of Israel from their slavery under Pharaoh and their deliverance through the Red Sea is underlined by the importance of the Passover feast as a key institution for the Israelites, and the fact that Israel was 'brought out of Egypt' is mentioned in over eighty verses in the Old Testament in the New King James Version. [Clearly, the fact that God had brought a people up out of Egypt is a very important part of the Old Testament message and story.](#)

Let me read you Deuteronomy chapter 4 verses 32 – 37 as an example:

“For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether any great thing like this has happened, or anything like it has been heard. Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? Or did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him. Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power.”

We can see in these verses how important it was to God that His people remembered what He had done for them in delivering them from Egypt.

The desire of some to return to Egypt is also clearly recorded in the Bible. In the New Testament, when the first Christian martyr Stephen gave his defence as recorded in Acts chapter 7, he said in verse 39, speaking of Moses, “whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt.”

Interestingly, the last mention of Egypt in the Bible is in the book of Revelation, chapter 11 verse 8, where we read about two witnesses for God in a time yet to come:

“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.”

We'll come back to that verse in a moment.

What does Egypt represent

Having considered how ancient Egypt is portrayed in the Old Testament, we can ask ourselves, what does it represent for us? What is the instruction that we can gain from these histories?

The central importance of the Passover and the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt to be a people set apart for God leads me to see ancient Egypt as a type, or picture, of the world, specifically, the world as a system opposed to and at enmity with God. The Pharaoh who refused to let Moses and his people go, even after the striking miraculous plagues that should have convinced him of God's existence and power, was one who did not know God, and who did not want to know God. When Moses first spoke to him about letting the Israelites go, we read in Exodus chapter 5 verse 2:

“And Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.’”

The previous Pharaoh had sought to exterminate the Israelites by commanding infanticide of baby boys, and this Pharaoh made the Israelites life hard through bitter slavery.

Now when we speak of ‘the world’ in the Bible, we need to distinguish between several possible meanings. In some cases, ‘the world’ means the people in it, in other words, humanity as a whole.

Thus, in the famous gospel verse in John chapter 3 verse 16,

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”,

‘the world’ means all people. In other cases, ‘the world’ means the physical planet Earth on which we dwell.

An example of this would be Acts chapter 17 verse 24:

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.”

But ‘the world’ can also mean that system of things which does not recognise God's rule and is opposed to Him. Here are some verses that speak of ‘the world’ in this way:

John chapter 7 verse 7:

“The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil.”

John chapter 15 verse 19:

“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

James chapter 4 verse 4:

“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

1 John chapter 2 verses 15-17:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

Ancient Egypt, which kept Israel in bondage and would not let them go, and was opposed to and at enmity with the One True God, is a picture of this meaning of ‘the world’ in Scripture, which is, as I said, that system of things that is opposed to God and to His Christ. The first epistle of John chapter 5 verse 19 further tells us that,

“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.”

The wicked one, in other words the devil, is the one who heads up this system of opposition to God. Like Pharaoh of ancient times, he keeps us in bondage, as we read in Hebrews chapter 2 verses 14-15:

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [that is, the Lord Jesus] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Just as the fact that God brought up a people out of Egypt is mentioned so many times in the Old Testament, so the New Testament teaches us clearly that, when we believe in and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we have been taken out of the world. For example, the verse in John chapter 15 that we read just a moment ago:

“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

Ephesians chapter 2 verse 1 - 5 remind us that we used to be of the world, under the sway of the wicked one, but now we have been set free:

“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”

And then we could look at the last time that Egypt is mentioned in the Bible, in Revelation chapter 11 verse 8:

“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.”

The world system, that system that is opposed to God, is the system that put our Lord on the cross, and here it is symbolically identified as Sodom and Egypt.

What does all this mean for us?

If ancient Egypt, the nation that enslaved the people of God, is a picture of the world, that is, the system of things in opposition to God, what can we learn from Egypt as it is presented in the Bible? How can the Old Testament accounts help us in our Christian pathway?

I would like to suggest two things for us to consider, although I am sure that there are several more that we could think about if we had the time.

1. Egypt was a place of bondage.
2. Amazingly, there was a tendency in Israel to want to return to Egypt.

Firstly, Egypt was a place of bondage. The Israelites served under cruel slavery. We have already seen in our quote from the letter to the Hebrews that the ruler of the world, the devil, keeps men and women in bondage. The Lord Jesus came to “release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

The danger is that we can return to bondage, if we are not careful. In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul says very strikingly in chapter 5 verse 1,

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

Who would want to willingly enter into bondage? And yet we do that when we slip away from the wonderful, liberating truths of the gospel. The gospel teaches us that we cannot save ourselves, and that there is no good within ourselves, but that the Lord Jesus is our Saviour, and that He has dealt with our sins. We are to put our trust in Him and look to Him for strength and guidance for our whole Christian pathway. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, in chapter 2 verses 6 – 7,

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

We received Christ Jesus by faith, and we need to continue to walk by faith in the same way.

Paul goes on to warn in the next verse, 8:

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”

We can be cheated by the world and brought back into subjection and bondage. Of course, if we have trusted the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, having been born again, we can never lose our salvation. But we can struggle under bondage when we place ourselves under rules and regulations to achieve holiness and acceptance by God, forgetting that all of our blessing and acceptance comes from Him and His work, made real to us by the Holy Spirit. When we try to struggle on in our own strength and resources, trying to be good enough for God, instead of rejoicing in what He has done for us, we go back into fruitless and hopeless bondage, as I can testify from personal experience. We go back under “the principles of the world”, as Paul wrote to the Colossians. This is effectively worldly religion, as opposed to faith in Christ.

Paul had to warn the Galatians in chapter 4 verses 9 – 11:

“But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain.”

We really can put ourselves in a place of bondage when we forget what the Lord Jesus has done for us, and we start trying to make it on our own. It is a depressing, futile place in which to be. What should we do? “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.” Let’s remember, think about, and put our faith in what the Lord Jesus has done for us.

The second point about Egypt is that the Israelites often wanted to be there. When the children of Israel refused to enter the Promised Land in Numbers chapter 14, they said (verses 3 – 4),

“Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?’ So they said to one another, ‘Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.’”

Earlier, in Numbers chapter 11, verses 4 – 6, when they were fed up with being in the wilderness, we read,

“Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!’”

They remembered various foods but had forgotten the slavery! But the image of plentiful food was just a mirage.

When the going gets tough on the Christian pathway, it can be tempting to look longingly at an easy life in the world. Demas, in the New Testament, was one such person who did. The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy chapter 4 verse 10,

“Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.”

How sad to return to the present world that has no time or place for the Lord Jesus. And yet, if we are honest, probably many of us can say that this temptation does arise. What should we do? Let's remember the words of the Lord Jesus in John chapter 14 verses 1 – 3:

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

We don't need to live for the world, because we have something wonderful, certain and definite to look forward to.

The Israelites had been delivered from Egypt, and it was not wise for them to think about going back there. We have been called out of the world, and it is not wise to put ourselves back into worldly bondage, living according to worldly principles. How do we overcome this spiritual enemy? Well, how did Israel overcome Egypt? In fact, they did not. God did it for them! He delivered them and led them out. In the same way, we will overcome when we place our faith and reliance on the Lord Jesus and His words. In closing, let us listen to the words of the apostle John in his first letter, chapter 4 verse 4, and chapter 5 verses 4 – 5:

1 John 4 verse 4:

“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

That is really encouraging! We trust in God who dwells in us through His Spirit.

1 John 5 verses 4-5:

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

This is really encouraging too! It is not by our strength, or our resolve, but by placing our faith in God. If I am honest, I often struggle with all these things. But let's be encouraged together, and let's “stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.”

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on Egypt, the second talk in the series on 'Know your enemy', talk number T1405. I hope it has helped and encouraged you!

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