

Our Trek Out of Sin

We all know the story of Israel in Egypt, in a land identified for its sinfulness. We may not appreciate just how steeped in sin Egyptian society was. Egypt is equated with Sodom and Jerusalem, evil cities known for their sins throughout history (Revelation 11:8).

Egypt's Gods

The entire society of Egypt was wrapped up in idolatry, pagan deities associated with most everything in the natural world, and the king was worshipped as a deity as well. It was this society within which Israel dwelt, in the Land of Goshen, rubbing shoulders with these gentiles whose worship of the gods of the creation and of their ancestors rubbed off on the Israelites. One source on this history says the following:

"It is almost impossible to enumerate the gods of the Egyptians, for individual deities could temporarily merge with each other to form syncretistic gods (Amun-Re, Re-Harakhly, Ptah-Sokar, etc.) who combined elements of the individual gods. A single god might also splinter into a multiplicity of forms (Amunem-Opet, Amun-Ka-Mutef, Amun of Ipet-swt). each of whom had an independent cult and role. Unlike the gods of the Graeco-Roman world, most Egyptian gods had no definite attribution. For example, Amun, one

*of the most prominent deities of the New Kingdom and Late Period, is vaguely referred to ... as the 'state god' because his powers were so widespread and encompassing as to be indefinable."*¹

These gods were patterned to a great extent after humans — they were born, some died (and were reborn), and they fought amongst themselves. Yet, they were immortal and always superior to humans. Some took on animal characteristics, like a hawk or a frog. The complexity of the god-cult in Egypt cannot be underestimated,

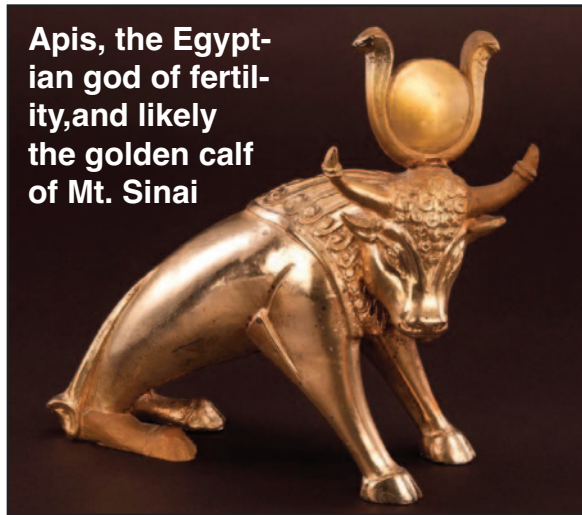
since over many centuries many new gods and their variations were added, but few were discarded; instead, they were layered upon each other in an ever-more-complex and seemingly convoluted manner.

Kings and priests could become gods, which gave rise to their burial with food and sustenance for the af-

terlife, and strange rituals dedicated to the eternal rejuvenation of the king. Great energy was diverted toward the reinforcement and protection of the office and body of the king. The king was associated with the gods Osiris, the first king of Egypt, and Horus, his son, which we can trace to Nimrod and the son of Semiramis, Nimrod's mother-wife² (see Genesis 10:8-12).

The concept of "maat", or universal balance and truth, was personified in the goddess Maat, which intertwined all aspects of correct daily behavior and thought. Individ-

Apis, the Egyptian god of fertility, and likely the golden calf of Mt. Sinai



uals were personally responsible for maintenance of the universal order, and if a person transgressed against the forces of order, chaos would result, leading to the sun failing to rise, the Nile River not flooding, crops not growing, and children abandoning their elderly parents. The king was required to maintain maat through his intercession with the gods, especially through the cult ceremonies performed in the temples every day. Religion and State were closely tied, and political obedience was an important part of the individual's religious duty.³

Israel Corrupted

It is against this backdrop that Israel lived near, and intermingled with, the Egyptians for 400 years. They arrived in Egypt at the behest of Jacob, an entourage of only 70 people (Genesis 46:27) who set up their homesteads in the Nile Delta. As the generations passed, the influence of Egypt crept into their Delta communities, prompting Yahweh to say,

"On that day I raised My hand in an oath to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands. Then I said to them, 'Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before your eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.' But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said, 'I will pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt'" (Ezekiel 20:6-8).

Pour out His fury He did, through the

hands of a new king, most likely as Assyrian ruler "who did know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). The stated motive of the Pharaoh to begin enslaving Israel was protection of himself and the nation against a people that were multiplying rapidly, and should a war arise they might join the enemy and fight against Egypt. This slavery can be divided into three stages.⁴

1. Severe bondage. The people were relegated to hard, forced labor in building cities to store grain and other crops. Despite harsh taskmasters, the people continued to multiply (Exodus 1:11-12).

2. Cruel bondage. Now the Israelites had to serve "with rigor" in continuing to build the treasure cities, while also working in the fields: irrigation projects were among the tasks they were forced to complete. Yet, they still multiplied (Exodus 1:13-14).



3. Deadly bondage. The midwives were now instructed to kill any male child immediately after it was born, and when Shiphrah, Puah, and the other midwives would not comply — then all of the Egyptians were told to kill any Hebrew boy they knew had been born (Exodus 1:15-22).

Clearly, Pharaoh's plan was to exterminate Israel, and force all of the women to marry Egyptian men, thus terminating the nation and God's plan. Of course, Yahweh would not allow the oppression to continue to that point — He had a promise to fulfill for His elect people — but His fury had been poured out. Now the nation was sigh-

ing with grief, and was being made ready for its long trek to Canaan, while the person Moses had been prepared, as an adopted son in the Pharaoh's court, to lead in that great undertaking.

Release from Sin's Grip — Destruction of False Gods

To release His chosen people from the grip of tyranny at the hands of Pharaoh, Yahweh plotted a unique plan: destroy the very gods whom the Egyptians held dearly as their providers and protectors. Let us take a look at each of the plagues God poured out on the Egyptians, and which gods these plagues destroyed in the minds of Pharaoh and his subjects.⁵

1. Nile River turned to blood (Exodus 7:14-25). A judgement against *Apis*, the god of the Nile, *Isis*, goddess of the Nile, and *Khnum*, guardian of the Nile.

2. Frogs all over the land (Exodus 8:1-15). A judgement against *Heget*, the frog-headed goddess of birth.

3. Gnats or lice throughout the land (Exodus 8:16-19). A judgement against *Set*, the god of the desert.

4. Flies for the Egyptians only (Exodus 8:10-32). A judgement against *Re* or *Uatchi*, both depicted as flies.

5. Death of Egyptian livestock (Exodus 9:1-7). Judgment against *Hathor* and *Apis*, both depicted as cattle.

6. Boils on the Egyptians (Exodus 9:8-12). Judgment against *Sekhmet*, *Sunu*, and *Isis*, gods of health.

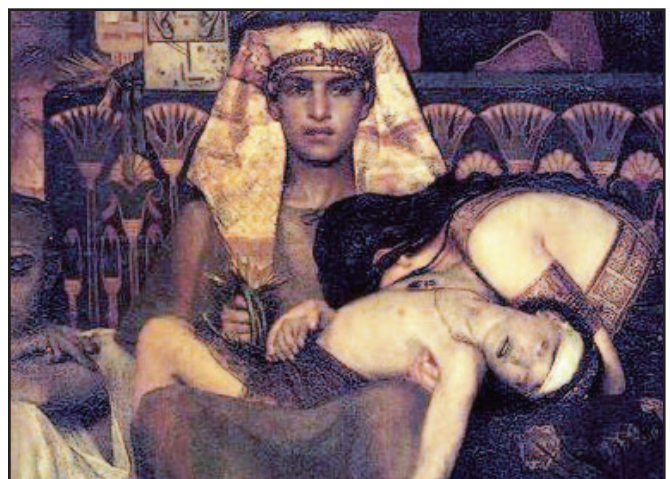
7. Storms with hail and "fire" on the Egyptians (lightning? Exodus 9:22-35). Judgment against *Nut*, the sky goddess, *Osiris*, the goddess of crop fertility, and *Set*, the storm god.

8. Locusts on the Egyptians (Exodus 10:3-19). Judgment against *Nut*, *Osiris*, and *Set*.

9. Darkness on the Egyptians (Exodus 10:21-23). Judgment against *Re*, the

sun god, who symbolized Pharaoh himself.

10. Death of the firstborn males of people and livestock, on the Egyptians (Exodus 12:29-30). Judgment against *Isis*, the protector of children.



The Israelites were required to kill one lamb per household, and to apply the blood on the doorpost and lintel of their houses so the death angel would see the blood and

“pass over” the house, sparing the firstborn. This required an act of faith, which revealed the life-giving power of Christ’s shed blood, symbolized by the sacrificial lamb (Exodus 12:21-23).

Coming Out of Egypt

Egypt is a type of sin, and out of that sin-pot Israel trekked, led by Moses, a type of Christ. He forsook his position of power in Egypt to help deliver his own people out of bondage.

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid of the king’s command. By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the temporary



pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the

firstborn should touch them” (Hebrews 11:23-28).

That Passover after Egypt’s firstborn died, the Israelites ate the lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs in haste, sandals on their feet, belt on their waists, and staff in their hands ... ready to head out after midnight and escape Egypt — leaving “sin” behind (Exodus 12:8-10). This they did; the lambs were killed the latter part of Nisan 14, and on Nisan 15 the nation left Egypt: men, women, children, livestock, and all they could carry, including what treasures they had been given by the Egyptians (Exodus 11:2-3).

For six days the Israelites moved towards the Red Sea crossing at Pi Hahiroth, eating only unleavened bread as they were instructed (Exodus 13:6-7; 14:9). There the Egyptian army caught up with them, and were prevented from attacking by the sea because of the pillar of cloud that gave light to Israel’s camp, but darkness to Pharaoh’s army (Exodus 14:19). On day seven, Moses

stretched out his hand over the sea, and that night a great east wind divided the water, creating a pathway by which the Israelites crossed over to Arabia, the Egyptian army in pursuit. By the time Israel had safely reached the other side, the Egyptians, having trouble driving their chariots, and before they could regroup and escape, were all crushed and

drowned by the collapsing walls of water on either side. The best of Egypt’s men were killed, the Pharaoh included (Exodus 14:13-29).

Out of Egypt, But the Battle Had Just Begun

By God’s mighty hand the whole nation

of Israel was “baptized” figuratively “into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (I Corinthians 10:2). They were “washed clean” of the sins they had incurred while being slaves in Egypt, and left behind that country of idolatry and lawlessness...then thrust to the shores of a new land, the armies of Satan crushed before their very eyes. They had to “... not be afraid. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Exodus 14:13-14).

The Israelites had broken forth into new life — a new heaven and a new earth, as it were — with their sins washed away. Yet, the walk ahead of them was by no means complete. Little did they realize that the promised land of Canaan still lay many miles ahead, and to get there they would have to walk through a grinding wilderness, punctuated by faithlessness, disobedience, and fear for 40 years.

We Walk in Israel’s Footsteps

So ... here we are, whether of the lineage of Jacob or of gentile extraction...

- Born into a world of sin, carrying the stigma of sin inherited from Adam (Psalm 51:5)
... like the Israelites born in Goshen of Egypt
- Having lived for years in a sinful world, breaking God’s laws in many ways
... like the Israelites living within the idolatrous Egyptian culture, and in slavery
- Receiving the Father’s calling, recognizing our sinful nature, and repenting of those sins, having faith that God will be our Guide and Rock
...like Israel crying under their burden

and pleading to God for deliverance

- Baptized and having hands laid on us to receive His spirit
... like Israel fleeing Egypt and passing between walls of water through the Red Sea
- Living a life of overcoming sin, Satan, and our selfish nature
... like Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, eating manna
- Looking for the heavenly city made without hands, the resurrection to eternal life, and kingship and priesthood in the Kingdom of God
... like Israel entering Canaan, the Promised Land

The Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread teach us to cast sin from us, as Paul said so succinctly:

“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed, Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (I Corinthians 5:7-8).

Purging out old leaven is not an easy task, because our sinful habits are such an ingrained part of us. We all have them to some degree, and they can hide in the most insidious niches of our minds. As David said,

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties, and see if there is any wicked way in me, and teach me in the everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).

Egypt was full of idols, and so is America today. We must cast away all of these idols that come between us and the true,

living God and become perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Do we set our hearts on any of these things here in affluent America, where we all have a standard of living far exceeding much of the world? Would we be content to live without these material things? Do we put any of these before God?

- A car ... maybe two cars, and a truck
- A nice home, or maybe two
- Land
- Children, grandchildren, or friends
- Collections of coins, books, or other things
- Music, movies, or entertainment
- Sports

H a v i n g “things” does not mean we are idolatrous. Abraham and Job were both very rich in material possessions (Genesis 13:2; Job 42:12), but most people with much wealth are tied up in those things, and few rich people will enter the Kingdom (Mark 10:23-25). We need to ask,

- How do I use my time? Do I spend a significant portion of that time in prayer, Bible study, meditation, fellowship, and fasting?
- Does my “servile work” take more of my time than it ought, and am I neglecting my family?
- What do I do in my “spare time”? (How you use that time defines who you really are.)

Examine Yourself Carefully

We need to examine ourselves carefully these Days of Unleavened Bread and see if any secret sins lie within us, whether or not we are truly “in the faith” (I Corinthians 11:28; II Corinthians 13:5). It is so easy to deceive ourselves as being acceptable as we are, since we all have a perception of how well we are doing, but Paul admonishes us to have a realistic view of ourselves (Romans 12:3), and not look in a mirror and then immediately forget who we are (James 1:23-24). James tells us to look in the mirror, understand who we are, and then be a doer of the law.

“But he who looks into the perfect

law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he d o e s ”
(J a m e s 1:25).



We can put away leavening and keep this Passover season as God desires by focusing our attention on service, for as Christ stated so emphatically,

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it; You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two command-

ments hang all the Law and the Prophets.’” (Matthew 22:36-40).

We need to serve God by serving our brethren — and others as opportunity permits (Matthew 25:31-40; Galatians 6:10). As Solomon said, the conclusion of the whole matter is to fear God and keep His commandment, for this is his duty. All of the commandments are directed toward God and one’s neighbor, even as Christ at the last Passover before His crucifixion said,

“... he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves”
(Luke 22:27).

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