

Exodus: Desiring Captivity

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Those who recall the time of their deliverance from captivity would testify they have been delivered out of bondage with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Do you recall a time when you wanted to go back there again? This is about the journey out of the land of bondage, and the ongoing appeal to return to its familiar environment.

The book of Exodus starts the story of deliverance of the Israelites out of an oppressing country. At the opening we get a clear picture of their state in the land of their captivity: "Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses." (Exod 1:11) "And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up to God by reason of the bondage." (Exod 2:23)

And God responds to the outcry of His people: "And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows" (Exod 3:7)

He promises great things, not just release from captivity, but a release into a good inheritance: "And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt.... to a land flowing with milk and honey." (Ex 3:17)

God knew that the king of Egypt would not let them go, except for God's mighty interventions. So while they sat back and watched with their jaws wide open, God indeed did deliver them out of captivity they got what they asked for in a grand fashion. God displayed His might in great wonders and unleashed afflictions on their captors while they did not have to lift a finger. What they did have to do, is one act of obedience get cover with the blood of the lamb. One simple act of obedience protected them from the wrath of God that was unleashed on the Egyptians. WOW! It certainly is glorious, and doesn't it reflect the time when you first believed great feeling of awe and joy and we could not have possibly have done anything except take up the offer, for free

They are free, and marching out of Egypt, joyfully so, until the first obstacle that is. The

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Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt as soon as they were out of her! The first opportunity they get, they ambush Moses: "Is not this the word that we did tell you in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." (Exod 14:12). And the cycle continues, whenever they were faced with the mere prospect of hunger, thirst, war, they wanted to run back to Egypt (Exod 16:3, 17:3, Num 14:3/4). It just kept going on and on. We think how is this even possible? Whatever happened to their crying by reason of their affliction and bondage?

Yet, this is actually a story that's all too common. Consider for instance the pattern of domestic violence where the victim is dependent on the offender, physically and emotionally because of some perceived benefit in the relationship. Often, the victim's identity is tied up in the dysfunctional cycle of violence and dependency. They just can't imagine life out of bondage, their identity is a victim's identity, and simply getting out of the relationship doesn't mean they leave it behind. Again, drug dependency is another example of a hard captivity with a deadly appeal.

I am Egyptian, ethnically only thankfully; spiritually, I'm proud to be an Israelite. I've been there, to Egypt, (physically) and spiritually. I've heard a teacher once say: "You can get the people out of Egypt, but the challenge is getting Egypt out of the people". He is right. I know too well the appeal of captivity. For the Israelites, it was the cucumber, the meat, the garlic what is Egypt's appeal for you?

God knew about that appeal too and he planned for it. He knew that the people would run back to Egypt if they knew that a long wilderness, and finally war was ahead (off course He withheld that bit of information from them initially) now that's what I call divine conspiracy. Oh yes, it's too familiar to us believers when God says: 'Go out of her,' and we say: 'yeah, sure lord' then we see the wilderness and as much as we want to run back to Egypt, the sea is closed up and the captivity is just out of our reach for one reason or another.

We see God stressing the point that there is just no return ticket to Egypt, the house of bondage. He instructs the people forty years later that the leader of Israel: "... shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: for as much as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way." (Deut 17:16).

Many of the observances which God later commanded his people to keep were for the purpose of remembering their time of captivity and their deliverance. "And you shalt remember that you were a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you: therefore I command you this thing to day." "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt: and thou shalt observe and do these statutes." (Deut 15:15; and Deut 16:12).

I guess one thing we can be sure of is that while we are in the wilderness, God will never want us to return to our captivity, so if you're in a part of the journey where Egypt seems appealing forget it! It ain't gonna happen, not according to God's will. God's plan may involve basic needs met in a long hard wilderness, protection, food and water, and in time - some serious spiritual

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warfare but it will not include a return to Egypt. From now on, the promised land is the destination.

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