

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS –

PART THREE – THE PURPOSE OF THE SAVIOUR

God's plan for His people had been quietly taking shape over many years and now He was ready. The man He would use, Moses, was prepared. The people of Israel after earlier doubts were persuaded of how great their God was compared to all the gods of Egypt. The opposition in the shape of Pharaoh was defeated. The people had grown softer in the hands of the Potter as Pharaoh had grown harder. The final plague was about to be let loose on Egypt. The first born of every family which did not trust God was about to die.

God's people were about to learn the meaning of Passover, the great feast in their year, which they were to celebrate for centuries to come. When the angel of death took the lives of the first born of Egypt, in chapter 12, they were to be passed over, as over a thousand years later, God would pass over the sins of all those who trusted Him, when Jesus died on the cross. The lesson was to be learned family by family as a lamb died for each household. Its blood would cover the entrance to their homes. Its flesh would feed each member of the family. John the Baptist would later describe Jesus as 'the lamb of God' (Jn.1:29), and Paul would call Him 'Christ our Passover' lamb. (I Cor.5:7) The family were to eat, packed and ready to leave, as we are to take in Jesus' sacrifice for us, ready to move out into a new life. For the next seven days they were to eat unleavened bread, bread without yeast, picturing our commitment to feed on Christ, the living bread, through taking in His word every day of our lives from now on. (Jn.6:51) Leaven in the Bible illustrates sin and wrong ideas which pervert the truth. (Lev.2:11; Matt.16:12; I Cor.5:7) Our 'food' is to be Jesus' way of looking at life, unmixed with our own view or that of the world around us. Fathers are to teach their children about the Passover, the way the Christian family is to be maintained. (12:26; 13:8,14,15; Deut.32:7) That night God did what He said; the first born of Egypt right up to Pharaoh's own family died, the Israelites were spared, and began to move out of Egypt with all they had. Apart from their own meagre possessions they took with them gold and silver given to them by the Egyptians as a parting gift, a token of the grace of God in which we move into our new life in Christ. (12:35,36) Many Egyptians joined them, persuaded that the Israelite God was the only one. (12:38) The door of salvation would always be open to all who trusted Him. When those around us see Christians living out their relationship with God some will join us.

The people of Israel were to respond, in chapter 13, to their salvation at the Passover by dedicating every first born child as well as the first born of their animals to God. It was to be their way of acknowledging their redemption, the process of buying slaves out of slavery by paying the price for them. Again they were commanded that this message must be passed on generation by generation to perpetuate the Christian family. They were to wear token scriptures on their foreheads and hands as a way of saying that they wanted God's word to be in their minds and their actions.

At this point God could have taken the Israelites north-east close to the Mediterranean Sea, the short route to Canaan, but He had important lessons to teach them before they were ready to move into their own land. He led them therefore straight towards the Red Sea. They were guided by a pillar which was a cloud by day and fire by night. When the pillar moved, they moved. Their guidance by God was based on a constant awareness of the presence of God among them and ahead of them. The certainty of God's presence in our hearts and situation is still the secret of being confident where He is taking us. Joseph's bones were taken with them in fulfillment of God's promise four hundred years before through Joseph that God would redeem His people out

of Egypt and that they would continue to have the presence of Joseph, who had represented Jesus to an earlier generation.(Gen.50:25)

For the last time, in chapter 14, Pharaoh's heart was hardened by God as he thought he saw the Israelites trapped between his army behind them and the Red Sea in front of them. Those with hard hearts, who seem to give in to God, will only have retreated for the moment, not repented. With 600 chariots, the ancient equivalent of an army of tanks, he took off in pursuit. The first reaction of the Israelites was panic, wishing they had never left Egypt and blaming Moses for their predicament. For the first of many times Moses had to remind them that when we find ourselves in impossible situations, we have only to trust God and 'The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.' The Israelites were commanded to move forward towards the problem, the Red Sea, before they saw how God would deal with it. Moses was instructed to stretch out his staff over the sea which parted before him. That same staff was so often to be a picture of the cross,(Jn.3:14) the greatest expression in all history of the power of God.(I Cor.1:18) The Israelites began to cross the Red Sea, one of many Bible pictures of death to our old life with Christ and sharing His resurrection life.(Rom.6:3-11) The Egyptians assumed they could do the same in pursuit, but the pillar of cloud and fire, the presence of God, protected His people and held the enemy back until the Israelites had completed their crossing. Once they had safely crossed, the pillar was withdrawn and Moses again held out his staff allowing the Red Sea to return and the Egyptians to drown. Finally the Israelites knew that their God was real, powerful and kept His promises, and they trusted Him wholeheartedly, at least for the moment.

The Israelites held their first worship service after crossing the Red Sea, in chapter 15, with a very graphic song which described exactly what had happened. Following the 'high' of worship, just three days later the Israelite congregation was facing a major crisis. They had run out of water and the only possible source was undrinkable. Again God's solution was a stick in the hands of Moses which he was commanded to cut off and throw into the oasis. Miraculously the water became good and able to quench their thirst. The cross continues to be God's power to make the satisfying 'water' of the Holy Spirit available to quench our thirst.(Jn.7:37-39)

SOME QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY.

1. Compare the first Passover with what happens when we come to Christ. What happened at the time of the Passover in the New Testament? How is communion as Christians similar to the Passover and how is it different?(chapter 12)
2. Compare the Israelites first steps out of Egypt with our first steps in the Christian life. How does God give us a sense of His presence and use it as His means of guiding us?(chapter 13)
3. How may we also face major attacks as we begin our Christian lives? In what way was the crossing of the Red Sea similar to baptism in the New Testament? Where else in the Bible is the same picture used to teach the same idea? How does this story show us the value of a public acknowledgement of our new faith in Christ?(chapter 14)
4. What was the theme of the song of Moses? What message did it teach for the future? What does it show us about the place of singing and music in our Christian lives? In what way do we become spiritually thirsty? How does God work in our lives in a way which is comparable to the waters of Marah?(chapter 15)