

Separation and Worship

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(These are notes of an address, as far back as 1840. — Ed.)

In order to give Egypt such a character before God as would allow the display of His judgment, Egypt must have the blessing through Joseph; for it is despised or neglected blessing that matures sin. As the Lord says, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both *seen and hated both me and my Father*;" i.e. they had despised the riches of love and goodness. So Judas perfected his sin by remaining unmoved at the gift of the sop, the token of personal kindness. Thus another king arose, "which knew not Joseph." The goodness of God towards her by Joseph Egypt had forgotten, and thus her sin was full, and she was ripe for judgment. Without the previous ministry of Joseph, therefore, the fulness of her sin could not have come, as now the world is *convinced of sin*, because they did not believe in Jesus.

This makes Egypt a sample of the world.

The Exodus is the separation of the people of God from the world. And I was lately struck with this feature in the scene, that Israel was to go out of Egypt in order to serve, or hold, a feast to the Lord (Ex. 5: 1; Ex. 3: 18; Ex. 8: 1, 20; Ex. 9: 1, 13; Ex. 10: 3, 9); for they could not serve Him or do sacrifice to Him in the land of their bondage and before that people. (Ex. 8: 25-27.) Their religious service was of such a character that Egypt would not tolerate it. It was something that so entirely went across all the thoughts of that people that they would persecute and destroy them if they were the witnesses of it. They must therefore go forth.

Now, what a character does this simple fact give Egypt or the world! God had no sanctuary there. The thoughts and ways of that land were so opposed to Him that He could not set His name among them. His people must go forth ere they could open His temple or raise His altar, because the very things which Israel would, as it were, sacrifice or crucify, Egypt was wont to worship. (Ex. 8: 26, 27.) Israel must therefore be separated from Egypt before they could hold their feast to the Lord.

And so it was afterwards. There was a fence all round the Holy Land, a wall of partition that separated Israel in Canaan from the nations. No stranger could eat the Passover, no uncircumcised one could hold the feast of the Lord. And so is it still. We must worship "in spirit and in truth." No man can call on God aright but by the Spirit which gives adoption, nor call Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost. It is still on the principle of separation that God is to be served or worshipped, as much as when Israel had to go into the wilderness, out of Egypt, to do so, or to distinguish themselves from all the nations by circumcision to do so.

The wall of partition is different, it is true; the place outside the land is not a mere desert, it is true; but the place of service is as distinct as ever it was. "Ye must be born again." This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent. "To whom coming, as unto a living stone . . . ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood." Here is the desert, the separated place, the sanctuary of God, within the partition-wall. The Holy Ghost raises it now. Union with Christ forms it; and within that place the abominations of the world are sacrificed now, as the abominations of Egypt were sacrificed in the desert of old. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are to be *crucified* there, though they are all *of the world*.

And what was the full feast which Israel held to the Lord when they got out into the desert? Why, it was actually furnished to them by Egypt herself. As soon as they stood on the banks of the Red Sea, they began to hold their feast. They did not wait to reach the mountain. (Ex. 3: 12.) It is quite true under that mountain they did afterwards serve, or do sacrifice, to God. (Ex. 19-40; Lev. 19.) But Egypt herself gave them a song before they reached the appointed place. Egypt was bold enough so far to resist them as to follow them into the very jaws of the Red Sea. Her enmity was perfect; but all this ended in giving Israel a song of triumph over Egypt. (Ex. 15.) Before they reached the place to which they had been called this joy was theirs. And so with us, beloved. Satan has done his worst, but Jesus, by death and resurrection, has overthrown him. Had not Satan drawn out his chariots and his horses, all the strength and power of his kingdom, to the hill of Calvary, the song which the resurrection puts into our mouth would not have been ours. But it is ours now, and he can never silence it. It has been raised by himself, and he can never silence it; and we too carry the echo of it in our hearts all through the place, till we reach the mountain of the Lord. In this sense Egypt gave Israel that song, in this sense the god of this world gives our hearts this song; for the eater himself yields meat, the strong man himself sweetness.

And, let me add, that what livingly and practically separates us day by day from the world is *communion with Jesus*. Faith, or the Spirit, or the new nature, is the first great exodus — our first going into the wilderness, out of Egypt, to hold our feast to the Lord, our act of separation from the world; but that place of separation can be maintained daily only by communion with Jesus, through the same Spirit who first drew us out. J. G. B.