

## **THE BIG PICTURE**

### **Introduction**

What does this year hold for us? Many are hoping that things will go back to the way things were before this pandemic. Others lament that things will never be the same! Then there are those who are saying there is a need for worldwide economic and social reforms – what will that mean?

The most important thing is, what is God saying to us, and how does he view the situation? I would like to share with you what he has put in my heart. It is taken from a story of in the Book of Exodus.

### **The Story**

The Children of Israel had been living in Egypt for hundreds of years. At the beginning they were well received because of Joseph and they prospered. However over time they began to be alienated, downtrodden and eventually they were made slaves to the Egyptians. Throughout history minority groups are often mistreated, often because of culture or religion.

Eventually the Israelites began to cry out to God and he raised up Moses. Moses went before the King of Egypt/Pharaoh demanding that he free the people so they could go and worship their God. He refused – the plagues followed, until finally he relented and he let them go.

## **A. GOD'S PERSPECTIVE AND PURPOSE**

Usually we think of this story from the Israelites perspective and how they were mistreated by the Egyptians, but if you read the account carefully you catch a glimpse of a bigger picture, of what God was doing.

### **1. To judge the gods of Egypt – Exodus 12:12**

God wasn't against the Egyptian people. We are told clearly a number of times that he was judging the gods of the Egyptians. You see they worshipped many gods – the god of the Nile, the god of the earth, the sun god – and the god they considered the greatest was Pharaoh himself. They believed he was a human manifestation of the sun god Ra – that he was the son of Ra.

- Behind these gods were wicked angelic beings who kept the people in bondage. Each plague was designed by God to bring down these false gods and dismantle their power. The final plague which was an attack against the god the Egyptians believed was the greatest – Pharaoh himself.
- Throughout human history there have been others who have come to power and demanded to be worshipped as god – Nebuchadnezzar, some of the Roman Emperors – and before Jesus returns there will be another world leader who will set himself up as god. The book of Revelation describes the intense spiritual warfare that will take place as once and for all God judges those wicked angelic beings. Even now the spiritual warfare is intensifying.

## **2. To show the Egyptians that he alone is God – Exodus 14:4, 18**

God wasn't against the Egyptian people. He cares for all men. The God of the New Testament is the same as the God of the Old Testament. God doesn't wish any to perish.

- We read in the Book of Exodus that God wanted the Egyptians to know that he was the true and living God – 'so the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord'
- Each plague demonstrated that his power was greater than the gods they worshipped
- Although Pharaoh's heart was hardened by pride there were many who left the gods of Egypt to follow the God of Israel
- We are told in Exodus 12:38 that '**Many other people went up with them**' when they left Egypt.
- As we look at what is happening today we may wonder - does God care about all those who are lost! Absolutely – that is why he has told us to 'go into all the world and preach the gospel'.
- Let's pray for open doors to share with others what Jesus has done for you.

*This week God gave me one such opportunity. Someone asked me to visit a man in a rest home who was dying. Sadly by time I was asked to go he was unresponsive, but I still told him about Jesus. Then I prayed for him. Just over 2 hours later he died.*

## **3. To deliver his people and fulfil his promises – Exodus 3:8**

- The Children of Israel were in Egypt for 430 years – for many years they prospered and during that time they didn't seem to recognize their need of the Lord. However as their suffering increased they began to cry out to God.
- God's purpose was not just to set them free from slavery and suffering, but to bring them into a close relationship with him – to bring them into all that he had promised them – a land where they could have peace, provision and security.
- Over the past year coronavirus has caused so much suffering. I don't believe God caused this virus, but I do believe God is using this situation to work out his purposes for the church.
- Many of God's children are enslaved with worldly things and their hearts are not fully after the Lord.
- He wants to bring us to a place where we turn back to him, so he can set us free from the things that bind us and bring us into all he has promised.

### **A New Beginning**

The last plague was the death of the first born sons of all the Egyptians. On that night God had instructed his people to take the blood of a lamb and apply it to the door posts of their homes. They were saved by their faith and obedience that night.

- God said to them – 'this is beginning of a new day – always remember this day.'

- **‘This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.’ Exodus 12:2**
- So on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of that month, which was the beginning of their year, they would always remember what God had done.
- As the Israelites left Egypt early that morning there was a sense of hope and expectation. In fact Egyptians had willingly given them their gold and silver!
- But it wasn’t long before they faced another challenge – they thought they were free, and this was a new beginning – but Pharaoh pursued them with his army and they were surrounded. What was happening? Wasn’t this a new day?
- Perhaps for some of us we are facing a similar situation. We thought everything was going well, but then suddenly things began to change. We begin to wonder what’s happening?

### **How did the people respond?**

- They had left Egypt with hope. They had seen the power of God time and time again. They had even seen how the first born of the Egyptians had died and yet they had been protected by the blood of the lamb on their doorposts.
- After all they had seen and experienced you would think they would trust God and yet they cried out to God, and complained.

***“Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us into this desert to die? Didn’t we say in Egypt ‘leave us alone, let us serve the Egyptians? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than die in this desert.” Exodus 14:12***

- It is easy to have faith and confidence when all is going well – but when the test comes, when we face a trying situation – how do we respond?
- It is so easy to question and complain and despair like the Israelites did, isn’t it?
- Let’s look at what God said to the people as I believe it is also a word for us.

## **B. GOD’S ENCOURAGEMENT AND INSTRUCTIONS**

### **1. Stand Firm – Exodus 14:13**

***Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring to you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.”***

- ‘Do not be afraid’! The real enemy the Israelites were facing was fear. Someone has said, ‘if you can create fear in men’s hearts then you can control them.’ We see how world rulers have done this all the way through history. Fear is one of Satan’s most common tools. Fear is not from God – he doesn’t give us a spirit of fear – Satan does.
- The Israelites were surrounded by their enemies and they were terrified.
- God speaks to them and says, ‘do not be afraid’. He knows the enemy uses this against us – all through Word of God we read the same words – ‘do not be afraid’.

- 'Stand firm' – in other words: take a stand, station yourselves, do not give way to fear.

*Perhaps some of you are dog lovers. But have you ever had a dog come towards you snarling – they tell you to stand still, don't run or you will be chased – don't act afraid or the dog will sense it and attack you.*

It says in **1 Corinthians 15:58**

***“Therefore dear brothers, stand firm, let nothing move you.”***

- What are the things that move you from standing firm, that rock your faith, from trusting God?
- A situation out of our control?
- The opinions of others?
- Disappointment in what others have done?
- God is saying to us today – we don't know what the year ahead will hold, but he is saying 'stand firm', 'do not give way to fear'.
- We have the assurance, just as God assured the Children of Israel, 'You will see the deliverance of the Lord'. He will go ahead of us and we can trust him.

## **2. Be Still – Exodus 14:14**

***“The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still.”***

- In this translation it says, 'Be still' – but God is not saying, 'don't move' – the word used means 'hold your peace', 'keep quiet'. In other words, 'don't say anything!'
- The Israelites had begun to complain and murmur, so fear quickly spread among the people.
- This happened again and again, until eventually many of these people died in the desert and never entered into the Promised Land. How sad!
- We can only enter into God's promises by faith and obedience. It is easy to speak with faith when everything is going well, but real faith is when we trust God in the difficult times, in the times when we don't know how things will turn out. And the truth is things don't always turn out the way we expect.
- This is the promise the Lord gave that day, and he gives it to us today – 'The Lord will fight for you.' That is a word for someone today. However things turn out – trust him.
- God is saying, 'if you hold your peace – be careful what you say – I will fight for you.'

## **3. Move On – Exodus 14:15**

***“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me. Tell the Israelites to move on.”***

- Imagine what it must have been like at that time! Perhaps you have seen the movie 'The Ten Commandments' and can visualize it the way they did. All night they must have heard

the sound of wind and waves and then in the morning seen the path through the sea. But what would happen if they walked through? Would those waves come crashing back? If so they would all perish. They had to trust God and move forward.

- We don't always know what will happen, but we have to walk by faith.

*I remember years ago facing a big decision. At that time I attended a conference and had prayed for God to speak to me. By the end of conference I hadn't received anything. The speaker was closing in prayer when suddenly he said, 'I have a word for someone'. I sat up – 'that's for me'. The word was: 'someone is facing a decision – either you can go through a tunnel and trust God or you will go round and round the mountain.' I knew that I had to move forward, not knowing how the situation would work out, just trusting that God would bring me through. And he did!*

- So Children of Israel crossed over safely to the other side, and just as God had said, he would fight for them. The Egyptians had followed them, but as soon as God's people reached other side, the waters came crashing back over Pharaoh and his chariots. That day the Lord fought for the Children of Israel. He delivered them.
- Another similar story is found in 2 Chronicles 20. On this occasion Israel was surrounded by another enemy and Lord spoke similar words:
- ***"Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours but Gods. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions, stand firm and see the deliverance of Lord will give you ... go out to face them."***
- But there's a difference in this story. As they went out the choir went first, singing and praising God. In the Book of Exodus though, it was only after the deliverance that Miriam led the people in praise and thanks. God longs to see us to respond as they did in the Book of Chronicles – to thank and praise him even before we see his deliverance. This is a demonstration of our faith and trust in him.

As we look ahead, we have the assurance that God sees the big picture and that he knows all things. This is a wonderful comfort to us as his people. We know he is good, and he is faithful. We may not understand what is happening globally, or where this will go – but we know we can trust him in every situation we face. God sees the big picture, not only in our world and nation, but also in our individual lives.

### **THE BIG PICTURE FOR YOUR LIVES**

***'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.'* Romans 8:28**

- Often we misunderstand what God really means in this verse. What is for our good? To many Christians it means they get better jobs, higher incomes, and have no problems. Those things not bad, but is that really what God means?

***'For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that we might be the firstborn among many brothers.'* Romans 8:29**

- The good that it is speaking about here is explained in the next verse – the good is that we are conformed into the likeness of Jesus.
- If we read on in this chapter in Romans we see that Paul speaks about troubles, hardships, persecution – about difficult things that happen in our lives, and in the lives of God's people – we are not exempt.
- But then he goes on:

***'In all these things we are more than conquerors, through him who loved us.'* Romans 8:37**

***Nothing ... 'will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'***

God sees the big picture – for your life – his goal is that you are changed into the image of Jesus. Yes there will be difficulties and trials, and we will all go through these eventually, but nothing can separate us from the love of God. So as we look ahead we can have confidence. He is with us – he sees the big picture and we can trust him. So stand firm, be at peace – and move with him.