

A New Exodus

A theological truth is that revelation is progressive. What that means is, in the course of history greater and fuller revelation is given to the people of God. (This, of course, increases the responsibilities of those who benefit from the greater revelation.) Revelation is like the opening of a flower; it's all there compactly in the small bud, but in time the blossom opens to ever increasing fullness. Thus everything in Genesis, for example, is proleptic, that is, its narratives anticipate things, persons or events in the future that will be similar in some way to what it was in Genesis, but of greater extent or greater importance. In retrospect, we can see the parallels. When God banished the first couple from the Garden from His presence at the end of Genesis 3, that anticipated a future exile – or exiles – each future one greater in scope, duration, or extent.

After having been thrown into exile, the human race proliferated in the world, but all were in sin and dominated by the Serpent into whose thrall they entered by believing his word instead of God's word. And then by grace God began a program, a mission, to bring His beloved human creatures back to Himself so they could be in His presence. In Genesis 12, Abraham was called to take the knowledge of God to the Gentile nations of the world enslaved to sin and under the dominion of Satan so that all people could be blessed. It was like an exodus from the exile that had been imposed in Genesis 3. The rest of Genesis is the journey of those who entered that exodus, the chosen family, to the presence of God, who was with them mainly in the form of promises. But, sadly, those chosen ones failed. They increasingly were becoming just like the Gentile Canaanites who also dwelled in that land. They were "worldly," that is, living according to the values, precepts, and lies of Satan and according to their sin nature. So they had to be sent into exile again, to Egypt. There, they were enslaved again.

In grace, God called Moses to deliver those chosen ones from Egypt so that they could resume His mission to take the knowledge of God to the Gentile nations of the world, still enslaved to sin and dominated by Satan. It was another Exodus. But it was greater in scope and extent. In that event, there were the leadership of Moses and his defiance of Pharaoh. And there were plagues upon the land of Egypt, a terrible defeat of Pharaoh and his domain, an animal sacrifice that made a new relationship with God possible, passage through a body of water, and a new covenant with Torah (instruction). And it was open to Egyptians, and some did join it. Then began a journey to the presence of God – the rest of the O.T. story. God was present with them again in the form of promises, but also in a cloud and behind a veil in the Holy of Holies of their Tabernacle and Temple.

But they, the Nation of Israel, failed too. They became worldly and sinful, disobedient to Torah, unfaithful to the One who delivered them from slavery. So they had to be sent into Exile. Another exile! But this Exile was vastly greater in scope. First, Assyria sent the Northern Kingdom into exile, and then Babylon the Southern Kingdom. That Exile persisted for centuries while one ruling Gentile empire was conquered by another. A small contingent of Israelites were allowed to return to the Land but they didn't constitute a sovereign nation; that was no exodus from exile. Biblically, Israel is still, even to this day, in that Exile. Yet the deliverance from Egypt recorded in Exodus was proleptic of a greater Exodus that was to come.

And so, in the fullness of time, by God's grace, another Exodus event occurred (or, more precisely, is occurring and will fully occur in the future). The Son of the living God came to earth in human form. God Himself came to visit His beloved people to lead them out of Exile. Jesus is another Moses, a vastly greater Moses. The infancy narratives, the Transfiguration, His teachings and miracles all show that He's another, better Moses. His Sermon on the Mount is a new, better Torah. This Exodus however is far, far greater than the one in the O.T. This Exodus is not only for Israel, but for all Gentiles who seek to enter it. And it involves a new and better covenant: one that includes the forgiveness of sin, a new and better relationship with God, and the empowerment to live a life that exalts God.

As with the prior one, this Exodus necessitated a sacrifice. That's one of the most important reasons for the cross. Jesus said at the last supper, at the time of the Passover celebration, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." He was referring, of course, to the blood of the lamb that was slain to save Israelite households from God's judgment upon Egypt. He was referring too to the sacrifice and the blood that was needed at Sinai (Exod 24) to ratify the covenant God made with His just-delivered people. Paul understood that a new Exodus was underway when he wrote, "For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed" (1 Corinth 5:7). The death of Jesus was the sacrifice necessary for our deliverance.

What deliverance? We were enslaved to sin, and to Satan's rule or control, and to the fear of death, and to following the principles and values of the world. And under condemnation, death. We were in an Egypt far worse than the Egypt of old. Satan is our Pharaoh, and he had an iron-tight grip on our lives, indeed, on our souls. But by believing in who Jesus is and what He did, we have deliverance from all of that. By means of the Exodus that Jesus effected, we are free. Free to begin our journey to the presence of God, just like in the previous exodus events. In 1 Corinth 10:1-11, Paul referred to the journey of those Israelites to the presence of God as anticipating our own journey. And for this journey, God is present with us. He is with us, again in promise form, but now not hiding behind a veil but directly in our lives, indwelling us. Our ultimate goal, the end of our journey, is to be in the very presence of the glorious God of the Bible and to enjoy Him forever.

Just as in the prior Exodus, we pass thru water; our baptism represents that. Our Torah is the law of Christ (see Gal 6:2), which is, essentially, everything written in the N.T. We're to obey it just as those Israelites were to obey their Torah – not to be delivered but because we have been delivered. On our journey we're to be sanctified by the Law of Christ just as the Israelites on their journey were to be sanctified by the Law of Moses. We're to be holy just as they were to be holy. And we're to take the knowledge of God to the Gentiles, to be "a kingdom of priests," just as they were (Gospel outreach is a priest's duty, see Romans 15:16). Just as Moses defied Pharaoh, that's what Jesus did. He defied Rome and its power to rule by going to the cross and then rising from the dead and ascending to the throne of God. And that's what we do when we participate with Christ in rejecting Satan's rule and values. The humiliating defeat that Pharaoh suffered occurred on a greater scale at the cross, where Jesus defeated Satan (see 1 John 3:8b and Hebrews 2:14). Our Exodus is vastly greater and more ultimate.

But what about the plagues? And isn't Satan still active in the world? And where is the Promised Land? Let's discuss this.

The Book of Revelation isn't a book of encoded riddles to be puzzled over. That's how most of us approach it. To the contrary, it's there to reveal our passions and lifestyles, and to reveal the world we inhabit, our relationship to it, and its destiny. More to the point, it narrates in prophetic form the continuation of the New Exodus. The 1st and 2nd Advents of Christ are really one Exodus event interrupted by the Church Age, which is like a parenthesis in the narration of this new Exodus. Thus in Revelation we find more (compelling) instruction regarding our journey and the anticipation of (future) deliverance as well. We also find there the ghastly plagues upon the world, we see the ultimate defeat of Satan, and at the end there's the entrance into the future, even more glorious "promised land."

Just as the Exodus from Egypt was both salvation (for Israel) and judgment (of Egypt), the cross was both a means of salvation and of judgment. It is salvation for those who understand and trust in what Christ on the cross accomplished for them. It is terrible judgment for those who ignore it or mock it. Judgment however was not then fully realized. It will be full and complete in the future when, as Revelation describes, God pours judgment upon the world and Christ returns to avenge His enemies. The New Exodus will then be complete and all God's people, all who had been delivered from sin and from the exile that sin necessitated, will enter into His exalted presence for eternal blessing. All those throughout history who refuse to avail themselves of God's grace and participate in an exodus remain forever in exile, banished from God's presence for an eternity in a place the Bible calls hell.

So for now, we're on a journey. We're not here to pursue personal happiness or to live as we please. We're journeying with God to God. So we not only must be holy, we need to mortify our innate sin nature. Our responsibility on this journey is to glorify God by being a person just like Christ and by doing what Christ would have us do, i.e., serve Him according to His will. The Book of the Revelation instructs us that the Serpent's whole world system is condemned and doomed, so while we're on our journey we should refuse to participate in its ideals and lies and refuse to enjoy its benefits even though we may suffer consequences for repudiating it.

Why is loving the world so offensive to God? Because it's exactly the same as what those who were miraculously delivered from Egypt did during their journey when they wanted to return to Egypt (Numbers 14). Loving the world says to God, "No thanks for all you've done for me and maybe will yet do. I love more what the Serpent puts on offer." We must understand Satan's world system (for a start, see Paul's many vice lists!) and assiduously avoid it, eschew it, and defeat it by living righteously.

Having experienced the new Exodus, our "journey" is so exceedingly important to God that almost the entire New Testament was written to tell us how we're to journey. The previous "journeys" (in the Old Testament) ended in failure and exile. Ours mustn't. Be responsible!