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ISRAEL IN EGYPT

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INTRODUCTION

Herein is presented an abridged version of Alexander H. Tuttle's sermon: "ISRAEL IN EGYPT." I have changed none of the author's words, but I have limited the text to that which I believe will best be of use to Wesleyan-Holiness ministers and readers today.

Even in this abridged form, the studious reader will find much good truth regarding EGYPT AS A TYPE OF THE WORLD -- which is the main emphasis of the sermon. The author's scholarly presentation of various aspects of Egypt as Typical of The World are such as the reader is not likely to find in most treatments of the subject by Conservative Holiness writers. This sermon is well worth the time necessary to carefully read and digest the thoughts presented, and I venture to say that more than one preacher who does so will use some of the information in his or her own sermon. -- Duane V. Maxey, Holiness Data Ministry, Surprise, Arizona, July 5, 2008.

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ISRAEL IN EGYPT

By Alexander H. Tuttle

Exod. 1:13. "And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour."

The purpose of the Book of Exodus is partly historical and partly spiritual. As a history, it aims to trace the deliverance of enslaved Israel by the power of God. But within that history is another purpose, to trace the deliverance of an enslaved soul from its bondage in sin into the perfect liberty of the children of God: and furthermore to track its career through this wilderness world to its God-prepared country in the heavens.

Such is the minute analogy between the historical exodus and the spiritual as to force the conviction that it was designed. Why not? God avowedly fashioned the heavens "to show forth his glory." He made our earthly relationships, such as fatherhood, motherhood, brotherhood, etc., to make clear to us our spiritual relationships, which would have been inexplicable mysteries and incredible only for the familiar facts in our daily life. We are expressly taught that "the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." Why then should he not make the history of the revelation people, whom he specially called that he might through them give to the world heavenly truth, a parable of the soul's history to the end of time? Such he has done. Here we have a history within a history. The story of the Exodus is a panorama of things more tremendous than the Exodus itself. Its persons and events are symbols and types of the movements of divine grace in the human soul. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. 10:11).

Egypt stands among the nations of the Bible story as a type of this world. When I say type, I do not mean simply that it was an illustration or a particular instance of the world life. That may be said of Rome, or America, or any other great country. But it was a prearranged fact, designed for that very purpose. What God said of Egypt's king is true also of the land he ruled: "And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name be declared through all the earth." Just as Babylon was a type of spiritual wickedness, and as Jerusalem was a type of the mystical church, so Egypt was a type of this world. There we see in clear outline the character, the methods and the end of that thing, so hard to define and yet so real, which we call "the world."

Paul speaks of it as "this present evil world." I suppose he calls it "this present" world because, though we are here for awhile, it is not our true home. Like Israel in Egypt we believe that we are not here to stay. There is a land far away which God holds in reserve for us. It is called "evil" because he who limits his love and purpose to the present has narrowed the breadth of his manhood and has perverted the very thing he has. The present must be throbbing with the vision of the future, else it loses its significance and becomes evil.

First of all, let us note a few of the characteristic features of Egypt at the time of Israel's bondage, and see how they image the chief elements of the world. They are teeming industry, imposing art, intellectual culture, stimulating pleasure, magnificence of religion. When we have studied these somewhat in detail, let us notice the effect of all this on the spiritual part -- bondage. "They made Israel to serve with rigour."

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I. THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF EGYPT AS A TYPE OF THIS WORLD are:

1. TEEMING INDUSTRY. If we could travel back three thousand six hundred years and visit Egypt, as it was when Israel was there in bondage, we would probably be impressed first of all with the bustling activity of this oldest existing and most powerful civilization of the world. Sailing up the green waters of the Nile we would for the time forget its history, although it is as thrilling as romance itself; for the first thing to attract our eye would be its stirring commerce. Ships from the great sea are anchored there: some of them from far-off India, having come through the great canal which at that time corresponded almost exactly with the modern one. Boats from the cataracts there discharge their cargoes upon the low banks of the river. Everywhere we hear the shout of busy men, sailors, stevedores, merchants, passengers. On either side we see the emerald and yellow fields threaded with canals for purposes of irrigation, extending on to the seared rocks which mark the beginning of the desert. Egypt at the time of which we speak was the garden of the world; and with an area but little larger than that of New Hampshire, supported nearly two thousand towns and villages, and such immense

cities as Heliopolis, Memphis and Thebes. And it had a population of eight million souls.

It was not only the garden, it was the factory of the world. A tourist ascending the river would notice a thousand smoking chimneys, telling of many and immense industries in iron, brass, gold, linen and glass. It was also the world's financial center. Around the banks and brokers' offices of Memphis the mighty wheel of universal commerce revolved.

We all know what that means; for centuries and geography make no differences in the essentials of human nature. The whirl of commerce is intense and absorbing. Its movement is like that of the Maelstrom. On the outer circle is delightful sailing. The next exhilarates. Swirling on the next, we feel the pulse of intense life. The next hurls us beyond the power of return. The next is the plunge of death. I would not condemn commerce as such, but he is dull indeed who has not noticed how quickly it blunts the finer sensibilities and blinds the spirit's eye. There is no movement of the soul more diametrically opposite that of the heavenly, and none more blinding and hopeless, than that of greed. Egypt in the splendor of her material luxury was reeling on the edge of an abysm of spiritual woe.

Another effect of this vast wealth of Egypt I am compelled to name. The tendency of wealth is accumulation. It has affinity for itself. It combines. It absorbs. The big fish swallow the little fish. That tendency, protected as it was for centuries by a strong and steady government, finally brought the entire wealth of the nation into the possession of a single race, the priestly and royal order. The government of Egypt owned all the land and all the industries. The people became practically, and in many instances actually, slaves of the Pharaohs. The Israelites were all slaves.

When one allows his spirit to come into bondage to his appetites it is an easy thing for him to surrender his nobler part, conscience, thought and every divine thing to him who can minister to those appetites. Formerly, when Israel loved right and God above material good, he could not be enslaved. They could bind him with cords and cast him in a dungeon; but even there he was a prince in spirit, and because of that he soon became a prince in fact. But later, when Israel hungered for the fish, and melons, and leeks, and onions of Egypt, he was already a slave in spirit, and soon became so in fact.

From all this we learn that the world spirit is not the true soil for the growth of the divine life. There is a singular prophecy of Jesus, "Out of Egypt have I called my son," which has a larger significance than most men see. Put the emphasis on "out of" and you have it. The Christian cannot develop into the divine man when living in sympathetic contact with the world spirit. Hence "out of Egypt have I called him." It seems that the spiritual race was brought again and again into union with Egypt to emphasize the fact that its divinity cannot flourish there. When Israel went to that delightful country they settled down to stay; for "their lines had fallen to them in pleasant places." It was fatal. The sons of God became slaves. The divine nature is

sure to come into disgraceful loss when it seeks rest in luxurious worldliness. Before that Abraham, called to be the father of the faithful, went down into Egypt and was worried till he returned to Canaan, the only field for the growth of the spiritual life.

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2. A SECOND FEATURE OF EGYPT AS A TYPE OF THIS WORLD IS ITS MAGNIFICENCE OF ART. Egypt has been called "the mother of art" though it unquestionably got its artistic impulse and its models from the ancient Babylonia. Nevertheless it is a fact that centuries before Greece began its brilliant history this old land was glorious with temples and statuary and paintings. Look at it as Moses saw it sixteen centuries before the birth of Christ.

There was the city of Heliopolis, the seat of the university of Egypt, where the great lawgiver was educated and where, long after, Plato studied. There were long avenues guarded on either hand by colossal sphinxes. There were forests of obelisks glistening like crystallized sunbeams, which they were supposed to represent. There were doors of engraved brass and walls covered with sculpture in bas-relief, very like the later Etruscan and Grecian work. There were statues and pictures which, centuries later, greedy nations carried across the seas to adorn the palaces of Augustus in Rome and Constantine in the city of the Bosphorus. Some of their monoliths stand in the parks of Paris, London and New York.

Ten miles up the river was Memphis, already hoary with a thousand years. There were enormous works of art, among them one statue of the great Rameses made of a single stone weighing nine thousand tons, which now lies prone on the sandy waste. Farther up the river is "hundred-gated Thebes" of which Homer sang and Herodotus wrote, the origin of which is lost in the mists of the far-off past, but which like Athens in its palmy days was one vast museum of art.

Across the river from Memphis are still standing those stupendous structures of which one has said, "Time mocks all things, but the pyramids mock Time." Amid them sits in awful grandeur that most solemn of all the monuments of history, the Sphinx, a lion's body nearly one hundred and fifty feet long, chiseled out of the living rock, and lifting its human head in grim majesty sixty-five feet above the plain. Its immense forepaws are stretched out in front fifty feet and embrace an enclosure where is erected a sanctuary.

Can I picture the august majesty of the temples which are built along the river? You pass between two towering statues, like those of Memnon which still stand elevated sixty feet above the river. You walk along broad paved walks, like that from Karnak to Luxor, four miles long. On either side sat the solemn sphinxes amid the crystalline obelisks. At either end were monster temples with sloping walls and overhanging cornices covered with brilliantly colored intaglios, and the doors guarded with giant statues of the emperor god. From slender poles long streamers

of crimson and yellow were flung to the winds. If we were permitted to enter the holy house, it would impress us as a dense cypress forest at sunset. Monster columns covered with brilliant hieroglyphs cast the blackest shadows across the vacant spaces. Man's presence sinks into insignificance. I need not describe the interior of the temple, but will only say that in respect to power and solemnity Egyptian art has never been surpassed. The effect of this feature of the great world on Israel was that it charmed the people of God into idolatry. How tame their simple patriarchal religion must have seemed to them in the brickyards of Goshen, with no temples, no priests, no altars, no images, no pageantry, only an invisible God and a holy life, and a hope long deferred. And all about them was this magnificence of an artistic religion. I do not suppose that the Israelites at first worshiped Egypt's gods; but trying to image their own Hebrew ideas under the influence of Egyptian art they fell into an idolatry of their own. In Joshua 24:14 and in Ezekiel 20:8 we are distinctly told that they did finally go over to the foreign idolatry. We know how at the base of Sinai they actually made a golden calf and danced their idolatrous worship.

Brothers, it is hardly necessary for me to affirm that I am a friend of art. I would not lift my hammer against the creations of beauty. Indeed the Christian spirit awakens the sense of the beautiful; and art never reached loftier heights in portraying the beautiful in architecture, poetry, painting and music than when lifted on the wings of Christian inspiration. But art is not religion. And when we make religion an art it is idolatry. Æstheticism is not virtue. Indeed it may be a lovely garb that clothes the rankest infamy. And the danger of spiritual Israel today in this splendid world is that its artistic charms may lead us into idolatry and licentiousness. Michael Angelo in his sonnet to Vasari says, "Form and color cannot give true peace to the mind; it seeks that Love which stretched out its arms to lift us up."

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3. ANOTHER FEATURE OF EGYPT AS A TYPE OF THIS WORLD WAS ITS INTELLECTUAL CULTURE. The story of the "wisdom of Egypt" is often told. We have already spoken of its school at Heliopolis. We know that Plato went there to study philosophy four centuries before Christ. Herodotus, Thales and Solon were there much earlier. For many years Egypt provided the leading minds of the world. It gave the world its ideas and disengaged its forces. In mechanical science, anatomy, medicine, chemistry, astronomy, mathematics, music and philosophy, that land reached a position that excites the admiration and even the wonder of our times.

But as this knowledge was sacredly confined to the few, and with a single exception not communicated to Israelites, the effect of it on them was to strengthen their bonds. Mind is mightier than brawn. The learned few used their knowledge to practice false miracles and magic arts and play upon the imagination and fears of a superstitious people. By their devices the priests made the people slaves, and used

them to gratify their lust for power and wealth. Even today knowledge, unless made the servant of the spiritual man, will soon become the taskmaster. There is many a man among us whose divinity is enslaved and the cords that bind him are his knowledge. Unless knowledge is built on a foundation of moral character, it is like a house built on the sand. Sooner or later "great will be the fall of it."

Unless the human intellect is vitalized by moral character it soon reaches a limit beyond which it cannot go. That was so in Babylonia. It was so in Egypt and later it was so in Greece and Rome. Among all these peoples and others besides, intellect was most vital when the nation was aspiring most deeply for the divine; and when its faith faltered its literature declined. It is often remarked that Homer, Plato, Cicero and Seneca reached the highest level that the mind of man, of its own natural vigor, can possibly attain. Beyond them the pagan world has never gone, and the reason is its want of vitalizing power. World-wisdom, understanding by that knowledge not saturated by moral character, suffers a limited development. Then when truth has lost its freshness the natural mind seeks to quicken it anew by the infusion of its own filth. In our day it is called realism; but it is the infection of fleshly lust doubly bestialized by its wanton publicity. The play of passion is mistaken for genius and the imperial intellect is debauched.

But out of Egypt's schools there came one [Moses], versed in all its wisdom, who had also the intuition of God. He was the man who furnished the thought which vitalized the dead world because it quivered in every fiber with "Holiness to the Lord."

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4. ANOTHER FEATURE OF THE WORLD LIFE OF EGYPT WAS STIMULATING PLEASURE. It is commonly thought that life in Egypt was somber, centering in the mummy and circulating about the sepulcher. But that is a mistake. Those who know that country best describe it as peculiarly gay, like Greece in its strength, or Rome when the entire world poured its treasures into its lap, or like Paris in the time of its luxuriance. Excepting in the neighborhood of the sanctuary and the tomb, the entire land was brilliant with music, banquet, dress, equipage, games. The land was reeling in the intoxication of pleasure. It is everywhere a characteristic symptom of a decaying heart.

I have used the qualifying word stimulating to characterize the pleasure which is of this world. To condemn pleasure as a thing unholy, or even as a thing not helpful to the higher life of the spirit, is to condemn that which nature, the word of God and the richest Christian experience approve. All nature tumultuously struggles for the best that is in it, and when it achieves it pours itself out in color or shout of joy. The rose pants to produce itself in fullness, then breathes out its happiness in color and fragrance. The bird in the fullness of its life warbles out its joyful song. The nature of the human heart is such that it demands pleasure. The attempt to suppress it is sure to result in one or both of two things: a powerful

revolt from the unnatural bands and a headlong plunge into the thing forbidden, as the river dammed only adds to the torrent's power, or there will be a deadly restraint of powers that ought to have free expression in order to the fullest manhood; just as monasticism, with its unnatural deprivations, degrades rather than exalts manhood. We are thus driven to the conclusion that pleasure is not only lawful, but that it is also mandatory. The unhappy man is not the truest man. Where that is the habitual condition we may be sure that something is awry.

In accord with the voice of nature is that of Scripture. While the Bible grapples with the dreadful problem of sin, and reaches down into the depths of a fallen world's woe, it bubbles over with joy. It is the gladdest book ever given to the world. The Old Testament is not a gloomy cult overshadowed by the thunderclouds of Sinai: its very law enjoins gladness. (Deut. 28:47-48.) As to the New Testament, it is the "gospel," which means glad tidings.

It is not then a question whether we shall have pleasure or not, but what our pleasure shall be. If it be in the things of the spirit's true unfolding, then it is healthful and satisfying. But if it be an effort to fill the soul's great want by ministering to it through the appetites, then two things will result. First, pleasure stimulates without feeding: it drives to excess for the reason that it does not satisfy. Then, secondly, all excess tends to death. It exhausts rather than builds up. It destroys the very power of enjoyment itself. No men are so miserable as the pleasure seeker. It was so in Egypt. All that luxurious gaiety failed to hide the grinning skeleton which it robbed.

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5. A FIFTH FEATURE OF WORLD LIFE IS MAGNIFICENCE OF RELIGION. The world must have its religion: for the religious sense is instinctive and therefore universal. Atheism is as unnatural as love of death. If it exists at all, it is in very exceptional cases, and then only by an effort, and usually a desperate effort, of will. Even in these exceptional instances, it totters like a spinning top when the originating impulse is about exhausted. The world can distort, but it cannot obliterate the god-factor which is an essential feature of human nature. When thus distorted, it may become a degrading superstition, or a darkening metaphysical intellectualism, or a showy æstheticism with magnificent pageantry of worship and splendor of art and song. In Egypt all these things were in evidence; but more especially the third.

The æsthetic sense is closely akin to the spiritual. Here lies the power as also the peril of the ritual which is a piece of art. That which was once a creative energy and a channel over which religious feeling might flow may, by the fact that it is art, become the force to suppress the very thing which it is supposed to create. It is easily made a substitute for the living thing. The performance of a reverent act may pass for reverence itself. Even when used in all sincerity, the feelings occasioned by the splendid service may be only the gratification of an æsthetic taste, and not a

real appreciation of the great divine verities that give the service its true value; such as the holiness of God, the richness of his saving grace in Christ Jesus, the beauty of character which is ours in Him. Worship then, instead of being the key to unlock the realm of the spiritual universe, becomes a dead routine. It loses freshness, healthfulness, and finally vitality itself. We have seen this principle frequently illustrated in the Christian church, where the most thoroughly worldly spirits have stilled the demands of conscience by a punctilious observance of an artistic religious service, in which æsthetic feeling passes for love of God and loyalty to goodness. But as in Egypt of old, it is none the less all of this world.

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II. THE EFFECT OF THE WORLD LIFE ON THE SPIRITUAL MAN -- ISRAEL WAS BROUGHT INTO BONDAGE.

This is the way in which it is described in the Book of Exodus:

"And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour, . . . and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage" (Exodus 1:13-14; 2:23).

These pastoral people were driven from the pasture fields into the clay pits to make brick, an employment regarded as of the most servile kind. The monuments show that foreigners were employed in these mean works under native overseers. We can imagine the cruelty of the bastinado which so roused Moses to strike down him who abused the Hebrew slave. Those of their number who did not work in the brick pits were compelled to cultivate the uplands of Goshen where agriculture demanded the most laborious toil, because of the necessity of watering by artificial methods, the use of wheel and earthen pots. Dean Stanley thinks that we have a perfect picture of the condition of the Jews during their bondage, in the peasants who are seen along the Nile today, naked under the burning sun, working through the day like pieces of machinery in drawing up buckets of water from the level of the river for the irrigation of the fields above. He describes the gangs of boys and girls carrying the earthen jars of water, and as they pass each other in mournful procession, chanting the strophe and antistrophe in melancholy chorus: "They starve us, they starve us," -- "They beat us, they beat us;" to which both alike reply, "But there is someone above, there is someone above, who will punish them well, who will punish them well."

Now all this seems like a story of three thousand six hundred years ago: but how accurately we have described the leading features of the great world about us today, with its busy commerce and its passion for wealth; with its elegance of art by which it charms the natural heart; with its massive learning and deification of

reason by which it extinguishes the heavenly light of the spirit; with its brilliant pleasures by which it disguises its misery; with its æsthetic worship by which it lulls the conscience and robes its vice. Names have changed, but the essentials of the Egyptian world are the potent forces of the world of today.

[The author concludes that for the one who is content to live in The World, like those content to live in Egypt, "It is sure Bondage."]

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THE END