

Serving Another King

This week, we are starting with the New Testament reading. The New Testament text gives a good introduction to the Torah reading.

New Testament:

Acts 7:18 (*Contemporary English Version*) **Another king was ruling Egypt, and he didn't know anything about Joseph.**

Stephen was a miracle worker, a powerful evangelist, an excellent Bible student. Nobody could refute him. This section of Acts contains Stephen's speech or sermon to the council.

Stephen's sermon recounted the history of Israel and then made a pitch that Yeshua is the promised Messiah. His sermon was so awesome he was taken out and stoned to death.

Moral of the story. Average sermons are much safer to give than awesome sermons. When I was a kid the pastor of a large church that ate many preachers for lunch lasted for many years. He survived the political battles, but **not** by the power of his sermons. In fact, it was probably due to the weakness of his sermons. His sermons did not rock the boat.

Torah:

Exodus 1:9-12 (*Moffatt Bible*) **he said to his people, "Look, the Israelites are too many and too mighty for us!**

¹⁰ **We must handle them carefully, lest they multiply and then, if we happen to be at work, join our enemies and fight against us, so as to escape from the country.**

¹¹ **So they put them under captains of the labour gangs; to crush them with heavy loads; and built for the Pharaoh the store-towns of Pithom and Ramses. ¹² But the more they were crushed, the more they multiplied and expanded, till the Egyptians dreaded the Israelites.**

Verse 8 says there was a new king. This is what you call compressed history. The verse is definitely a Reader's Digest version of history. Centuries of history are compressed in this one sentence.¹

This new king did not know Joseph. The king might not have known Joseph for a good reason. He may have been more than just a new king. He may have been from a different dynasty² or ruling group of kings. The word know in Hebrew can imply a personal relationship.³ This might mean the new king had forgotten how much Joseph had done for Egypt.⁴ He may have known the history of Joseph, but that was now history. And it was old history. He was not personally, intimately aware of how much the God of Joseph had protected and blessed Egypt.

This may be more than not being intimately familiar with the history of Egypt. The Hebrew also carries the meaning of approving or acknowledging.⁵ The king might not have liked or approved of the system of government Joseph established.⁶ There is a tendency for people new to a position to want to change things. The desire is to leave their personal stamp on the company or the government department. In the process, there is a tendency to change things that worked very well. It can amount to change for the sake of change. That might be part of what we see taking place.

¹ Walter R. Roehrs and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1979), 61.

² Robert Jamieson. *A Commentary: Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*. Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1995), Part 1, 276.

³ Roehrs and Franzmann, 34.

⁴ Roehrs and Franzmann, 61.

⁵ Adam Clarke. *Clarke's Commentary*. Vol. 1. (Nashville: Abingdon: n.d.), 293.

⁶ Clarke, 293.

Verse 8 of Exodus reads "A new king rose over Egypt." In Hebrew there is an additional meaning. This verse could be translated, a new king "arose against Egypt."⁷ When people rise up against God's people, they end up rising up against their own people and against themselves. Persecuting God's people is not a good way to find success.

Verses 9 and 10 show us how afraid the king was of the children of Israel. There might be a reason for that fear. Adam Clarke mentions speculation that the new Pharaoh might have been concerned about oppression Egypt suffered under shepherd-kings. Since the children of Israel were also shepherds, he might have feared them, thinking they might rise up and oppress Egypt.⁸

In Verse 11, we understand the children of Israel were put in labor gangs. They were enslaved. The conditions were not humane.⁹ In addition to being forced to do hard work, the children of Israel may have been forced to pay taxes.¹⁰ That is what you call adding insult to injury.

Haphtarah:

Isaiah 29:22-23 (*Moffatt Bible*) **This therefore is the word of the Eternal, the God of Jacob's house, who rescued Abraham: "Never again shall Jacob be dismayed, never again disgraced; for once they see all that I do among them, they will revere me, they will revere the Majesty of Jacob, they will hold Israel's God in awe."**

The Haphtarah section comes from Isaiah Chapter 29. The Haphtarah verses are about the restoration of Israel.

Summary Thoughts:

What meaning can we get from these verses for our lives?

- Egypt represents materialism. For the children of Israel, Egypt was a place of shelter and happiness.¹¹ Things, homes and possessions that made us happy can become a burden. Family and friends can turn against us. Those things that brought happiness can become an affliction, a cross to carry.¹²
- These verses remind us of what is most important in life. People forget the good things we do. They forget very soon. As the Pharaoh forgot Joseph's deeds, accomplishments that saved Egypt's hide, people forget the good things we do. Being a people pleaser is of no lasting value. That is why we need to place serving God ahead of serving people. God does not forget!¹³ The benefits of serving God are permanent.
- When people attempt to defeat God's people, through persecution, their efforts fail. God blesses and works through tough times. The cross of Calvary reminds us of that.
- The portion helps us understand life's cycles. There are times when life is hard. Life's periods of hardship are followed by an exodus experience. The cycle is there in our lives. And eventually, we will all have the promised land experience, because Yeshua gives us the promised land.

⁷ *The Complete Word Study Old Testament: King James Version.* (Iowa Falls, IA: World, 1994), dictionary, 90.

⁸ Clarke, 293.

⁹ D.A. Carson, et. al., eds. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition.* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1997), 95.

¹⁰ Clarke, 293.

¹¹ Matthew Henry. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume.* (Peabody, MA: Hedrickson Pub., 1992), 95.

¹² Henry, 95.

¹³ Henry, 95