

People of Light in a World of Darkness

By Kevin Phipps

Genesis, or Bereshit is about beginnings. Not just the beginning of the world, but the beginning of Israel, the nation of God's people. The seed is planted in Avraham, and by the time we get to Yosef, we see the nation in its infancy. Oddly, however, this small group of God's people end up being sent, by God, to Egypt, the center of Pagan culture and religion of that day. This would be as if a wealthy man sent his two-year old child to live his or her next ten years in a crack house. It doesn't seem to make much sense. Ya'akov and his family are already in the land, which would later be the Promised Land. Why take them out and send them to Egypt where there is so much darkness and where they would become slaves to Pharaoh? Why couldn't God skip Egypt, and the eventual Exodus, and go straight to Eretz Israel?

There are two primary reasons why God would intentionally send His people into a world of darkness. First, God's people often need to experience adversity in order to better see the glory of God. The stars in the sky shine just as bright during the day as during the night, however, even though many stars are much bigger and brighter than our own sun, since our sun is closer to us, its light greatly outshines the other stars during the day so they cannot be seen.

Likewise, the light of God, though vastly brighter than any artificial light the world has to offer, is easily outshined by the light of the world, since we are carnal creatures living as part of the world. When the world around us is darkest, that is when God's light can be seen the best. Infant Israel needed this contrast to better see the glory, majesty, power, and love of God. God would later bring his people back to their time in Egypt and His deliverance from it to remind them of who he is. In fact the first commandment of Torah is actually a statement. "I am the lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt where you were slaves."

Why do some people lift weights as a recreational activity? Few do it because they enjoy inflicting pain upon themselves, even though that's what they do. They do it because when muscles are worked and actually overworked to the point where some damage is done to the muscle fibers, the body repairs those muscles to be bigger and stronger than they were before. In time, the person has bigger and stronger muscles. Faith works in the same way. When life is easy, our faith is usually not worked very hard. However, in the midst of adversity, our faith is tested. Through such testing, our faith grows stronger.

Sometimes God leads his sheep to green pastures, and sometimes to the valley of the shadow of death. In either place, God is there. However, it is important for God's people to neither seek out the green pastures or the dark valleys of life. Rather, they ought to seek after and follow God. That is what Yosef did and what his brethren did as well. It lead little Israel to Egypt, but later, it would lead a larger, stronger, and more mature Israel to a land flowing

with milk and honey.

The other reason why people of light are sent to places of darkness is that people living in darkness need to see the light of God through the people of God, so they too can have the opportunity to become carriers of the light. Yosef is the perfect example of what ought to happen and what can happen when God's people carry His light to people living in the dark. First of all, Yosef's primary purpose is to be a man of God and to serve Him. All Yosef does centers around this. He recognizes that God has put him in the situations he is in, whether pleasant or unpleasant and he keeps his focus on God in either case. Rather than getting upset or depressed when faced with adversity, he uses God's wisdom to make the most of the situation and help those around him any way he can. Social or spiritual status does not influence Yosef's dealings with people, including Pharaoh. History would be completely different if Yosef had the unforgiving and calloused heart toward pagan people that Yonah had. In helping Pharaoh and the Egyptians, he ended up helping those outside of Egypt as well, which included his own family. He sees the greatest needs the people around him have and seeks to use whatever resources he has to meet those needs. He remains humble even when exalted to high position. In all this he wins the respect of most around him, including Pharaoh himself.

Pharaoh and the rest of Egypt never adopted the God of Yosef as their own, however, Pharaoh acknowledged the reality and goodness of Yosef's God. "So let your light shine before men, so that others may see your good works and glorify your God in heaven". This could have been Yosef's life verse. He lived it every moment of every day and literally saved the world because of it. We are commanded to let our light shine so others may see it. What happens from there is the work of God.

We are in this world to exercise our faith and share God's love to the lost and dying people. One moment we may be sitting in a prison, the next, a ruler of a vast domain. But, the focus must always be God and His light that dwells within each of us. Let it shine!