

God's Way Out

"For Us And For Our Little Ones"

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."

Ezra 8:21.

Lesson 4. Through Plenty and Famine to God

If ever you have wished you could have insight into the way God plans for the nations, this remarkable story will satisfy that desire. Read this strange fourteen-year plan.

THE Flood had been well-nigh forgotten--as we have well-nigh forgotten it today. But to those who forget that God can send or withhold the rain, it will come as a surprise to learn that divine providence once stepped in and definitely controlled Abyssinia's rainy season for fourteen years. That was "God's Great Fourteen-Year Plan." There were seven years of heavy rains, to prepare for seven years of scanty rains--seven years of famine.

For it now seems definitely established that Abyssinia's summer rains, filling the tributaries of the Nile, were responsible for Egypt's seven years of plenty as foretold in the story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis. [1] Meager rains in the Abyssinian mountains brought about also the seven years of famine that followed. The words used, "Years of famine," literally mean "Hunger Years"--the exact term the Egyptians used in speaking of years when the Nile flood ran low. And God not only controlled this, but revealed it to the king in advance. He who sent a deluge that covered the earth also watches over the floods of the Nile.

The fishermen around Abyssinia's Lake Tana probably wondered about it the first year. What could be causing these strangely heavy rains?

Lake Tana itself, forty miles wide, poured out every rainy season a mighty volume of water through its overflow in the south. But this year, and for six years after, fed by a thousand rivulets and a million trickles from the mountains, it was enough to awaken widespread comment.

And when that overflow, the River Abai, was joined by the roaring flood of the River Didessa, the surging waters of the Jamma, the noisy Muger, the Rahad, and the Dinder, other rivers of Abyssinia, there roared down to meet the White Nile a sweeping flood of nigh ten thousand tons of water a second. [2] Ten thousand tons of brown, muddy-looking water every second! What a mighty torrent!

Outside of the rainy season this Abyssinian river--now called 'the Blue Nile--passes scarce two hundred tons of water a second. No mean river this! But when the White Nile from Victoria Nyanza, with its eight hundred tons a second, unites with this rough giant of a river from the Abyssinian mountains in flood time--what a mighty volume of water is sent swirling down the valley to Egypt!

Such a roaring flood would work havoc in most countries, but in the Nile Valley the annual inundation is received with joy. Big Nile, big harvest. Low Nile, little harvest. Even the small boys in Egypt knew that. There, where the patter of rain is seldom heard, it is the yearly flood which causes the vegetation to flourish. So, as the great river rose, there was gladness in the homes of Egypt.

"Overflow thy banks, O Nile, thou river of food. Cover and soak these parched fields! Splash through the sluices and the canals prepared for thee!" sang the people in their hearts. "Fill the waiting reservoirs!"

"Rise, rise, O Nile! Out of thy fertilizing flood shall come fat cattle for our sustenance; ears of corn, full and good; wine of the grapes to fill our cups. Yea, rise, rise up, O Nile!"

Such were the joyful hopes expressed in the Egyptians' songs of praise to the great river which brought the waters of Abyssinia over two thousand miles to bless their land. In the royal palace of Egypt, God revealed His plan for the future to Pharaoh in a strange dream, and the king felt when he awoke, this was a revelation of tremendous import.

In the dream, Pharaoh stood by the River Nile. As he looked over its rippling expanse, he saw seven fine fat cows--water buffaloes--come splashing up out of the water. There was a splashing sound farther out in the river, and behold! seven lean, hungry, ugly cows follow the fat ones. To Pharaoh's astonishment the lean cattle at once attack the stronger ones and proceed to devour them. And after devouring them, the thin ones are still as lean-looking as before!

Then seven plump ears of corn grow up on one stalk of wheat. And behold! seven withered ears of wheat seize them and devour them. No wonder the great ruler of Egypt was puzzled, and called for his wise men when he awoke. No wonder his magicians and astrologers could give him no interpretation of the dream. But Joseph, the Hebrew man of God, being hurriedly brought out of prison, gave the explanation: "There shall be seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt and then seven years of famine," he declared. "The famine shall be very grievous, so that all the plenty shall be forgotten."

Pharaoh and his people well understood that the Nile was responsible for bringing Egypt food, but they worshipped the flowing river itself, forgetting Him who gave the rain to fill its channel. God in His love was now planning to send them a period of great prosperity, and so that they might recognize Him as the Giver of this good thing, He had caused Pharaoh to dream this dream and had raised up Joseph to explain it.

“What God is about to do, He is showing Pharaoh,” declared the handsome young Hebrew interpreter. “There are coming seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, and then seven years of famine.”

“This is a prophetic dream from God, O King. It is a light shining in a dark place. Store up all the surplus food during the seven good years so that there shall be food during the years of famine.”

What Will Pharaoh Do?

Pharaoh listened intently. What a simple interpretation! What a practical suggestion! After he had conferred with his ministers it was felt: “Here is the very man.” Joseph was appointed to carry out the plan. That was God’s way out of famine. That glimpse of the future which came by night enabled Egypt to lay up barns and barns full of corn--so much corn that she had sufficient for herself, and food to sell to other nations during the years of famine.

What a Fourteen-Year Plan!

What a hope-giving light from God! Into the gloom of the hunger years the prophecy shone with its message, “Not forever! Seven years--and no more. Seven years--and no more!”

“What God is about to do, He shows,” said Joseph. Often God has set apart a period for some great plan. We do well to search the Scriptures for these prophecies which relate to our day. Perhaps we, in this twentieth century, are becoming dull of hearing to that Power which speaks to us through the Word of prophecy, through the fruitful harvests, through the falling rain, and the rising sun. Is not God still able to do wonders with the elements He has ordained?

Yes, God still sees our future. He will do good to those who trust Him. Do not fear to confide in Him. “God is good, O mighty King,” whispered the waves of the rising Nile as the abundance of the first year’s flood surged and rippled over the land. “Worship Him that made the fountains of waters, and forget the gods of wood and stone.”

"Yes," came the song of rustling corn and the tremulous vine leaves in the harvest months that followed. "Yes, praise Him who sent the vision and the dream. Praise Him who raised up Joseph, Zaphnath-Paaneah - the Revealer of Secrets."

God was true to His word. The prophecy came to pass. In the seven years of plenty the earth brought forth grain by handfuls. Joseph, the one-time prisoner, now Grand Vizier or Prime Minister, wearing the king's gold chain about his neck, was able to gather supplies of "corn as the sand of the sea, very much until he left numbering; for it was without number." No wonder if his beautiful young Egyptian wife, Asenath, spoke with pride and tenderness of her capable, affectionate, high-principled husband.

After the Seven Years of Plenty

Then God's great pendulum swung again. Prosperity, adversity! Prosperity, adversity! Both are God's agencies to lead the children of men out of trouble and back to Himself. After those seven years of plenty, "there shall arise after them, seven years of famine," Joseph had said. And, true to the divine word, the years of famine came.

The river rose so little in the eighth year--what had happened to the springs of the Nile? Where were those bountiful floods which had brought such prosperity to the land? Well might the priests chant: "Tell us, O Hathor! Help us, O Isis!"

But Egypt's gods were dumb. The rains of Abyssinia had failed--or the seasons shortened, perhaps. But why? And why came there just now on Egypt's scant riverside growth that scorching, blasting wind of the eastern desert, spoiling even that which did chance to grow? Why? Because God had withdrawn His prospering hand. Adversity's voice is often heard when prosperity has called in vain. The churches fill in time of adversity; they empty in time of prosperity.

Egypt thought little of God or His messenger in the time of prosperity. But in the years of famine they were directed to Joseph. "Go to Joseph," the king instructed them. "God has shown him the way out of famine." The eyes of all Egypt were on Joseph. And Joseph satisfied their needs. The wonderful dream of Pharaoh was probably talked of in every town and village, in every market square and street. Joseph's testimony to the true God would be the subject of conversation in every home.

"Joseph's God has saved Egypt from death through famine. The gods of Egypt--Hapi, Hathor, Isis, Thoth--are powerless!" would come the conviction to every open mind. Just as in our day science, invention, education, and wealth without

God, are powerless. But the influence of God's great fourteen-year plan was noised abroad far beyond the boundaries of Egypt. "All countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands," [3] says the Sacred Record.

Caravans came converging on old Egypt; camel caravans from the Sudan and Arabia; caravans with braying donkeys and snarling camels from Syria and Mesopotamia. Phoenician traders were shouting in their little ships as they approached the delta of the ancient Nile. Traders from all lands chatted excitedly in the market-places of Egypt. For the famine was in all countries of the earth, and the news had spread that there was food to be bought in Mizraim's land-Egypt, the land of the Pharaohs.

The report was true. Here the merchants found the state corn stores were packed with golden grain in overflowing abundance!

To the strangers there was a mystery about all this. Egypt's parched fields showed that this land had suffered crop failures almost as severe as those at home. No wonder the merchants' tongues wagged excitedly as they puzzled over these strange contradictions. "Your fields are stricken with famine like ours, but you have stored up corn like the sand of the sea for abundance. Marvelous! When did you harvest all this grain? Did you know these hunger-years were coming?"

And the answer was the strange story of the royal dream of eight or nine years before. A dream given by the God of all good to Pharaoh; interpreted by Joseph, who was re-named "Zaphnath-Paaneah" (Revealer of Secrets), worshipper of Jehovah, who knows the future and sends the sun and the rain for the blessing of His creatures.

What a drama! Idol-worshipping Ethiopians, Libyans, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Arabians, they go to Egypt for bread; they return with their sacks full, and with thankfulness to Joseph and his God. The nations who had wandered from God heard His voice again as their women sang at the millstones and ground out the wheat which His love and foreknowledge had supplied. God's way out, His great fourteen-year plan to bless the world by supplying their needs in time of famine--it would be the great news of that century. Probably a million lives or more, perhaps--were saved by the wonderful dream-prophecy.

Sure as the incoming tide, the divine plan had gone into operation at the time appointed. And just as surely it closed.

When God's great clock showed the midsummer hour of the fourteenth year, the rains beat as of old on the dark faces of the fishermen on the shores of Lake Taila. Again the tributary rivers--the Didessa, the Muger, the Jamma, and the Dinder poured their floods into the Blue Nile with the fertile silt that was to make the parched lands of Egypt green once more.

This was God's way out of famine!

REFERENCES:

Encyclopaedia Britannica, article Abyssinia, page 85.

Encyclopaedia Britannica, article Nile, page 695.

Genesis 41:57.

