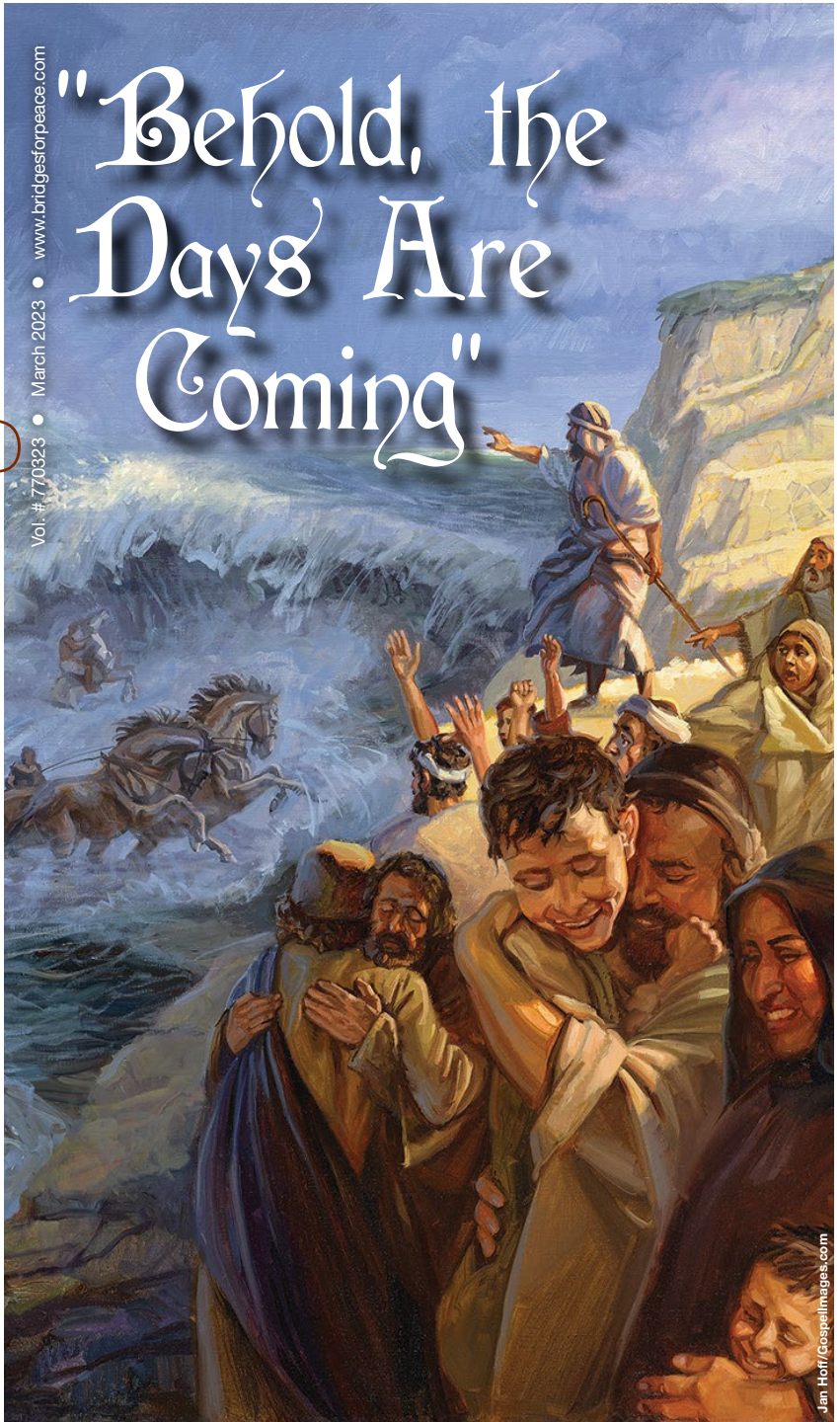


"Behold, the Days Are Coming"



Jan Hoff/Gospelimages.com

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IT'S THAT WONDERFUL TIME OF YEAR again when the seasons are beginning to change and Passover is just a few short weeks away. Jewish families all over the world will soon begin their preparations for one of Judaism's most celebrated holidays, cleaning their homes from top to bottom. There was a time when spring-cleaning was something everyone did, sweeping out the winter cobwebs and opening the windows to welcome the light spring breeze. But for most people today, it is not such a well-known custom.

For the Jewish people, however, it is not just a custom but also a religious obligation. The Bible is clear that for Passover,



every Jewish home must be free of *chametz* or leaven. Not a crumb is to be left behind, and every nook and cranny must be explored and thoroughly cleaned to make sure all traces of leaven are gone. When *Erev Pesach* (Passover Eve) arrives, families will gather together in their sparkling clean homes, eat delicious food from their very finest dishes and tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

That's the most important part: telling the story of a man who was called by God to change the course of history and a people who were chosen to bring His message of love and deliverance

to a desperate world. God entrusted these people with the incredible gift of His *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), instructing them to cherish it, follow it, obey it and live it out before the nations so that they too would know Him. But first, there were lessons to be learned.

RECOGNIZING THE ONE WHO REIGNS SUPREME

One of the most crucial of those lessons had to do with the sovereignty of God. Both the Hebrews and the Egyptians needed to recognize God's absolute authority and His ultimate control over all things. After 400 years as slaves of Pharaoh, His people would have to learn the true meaning of freedom, God's freedom, the freedom to choose to be in bondage to Him. The proud and powerful Egyptians would have to humble themselves before the God of the universe, forsaking their pantheon of hundreds of false deities and surrendering to the Lord, the God of the Hebrews. Finally, the bonds that connected the Israelites to Egypt would have to be broken, freeing God's people in every way for all time from their dependence on their Egyptian slave masters.

We all know what an incredible story it is. Filled with excitement and treachery, adventure and mystery, obedience and rebellion, forgiveness and mercy, the saga takes us from the Hebrews' bleak existence as slaves to the terror of the parting of the Red Sea through 40 years in the desert until at last they arrive—changed and triumphant—in the Land God had promised them. Many scholars agree that those 40 years were a necessary step in God's plan to eliminate any remaining tendency to depend on Egypt by reverting to the mentality of slaves. After all, the Israelites had only tasted freedom for a few short weeks when they expressed their desire to go back to their miserable existence rather than face the difficulties ahead. Through a bit of historical revisionism, they convinced themselves that they were better off as slaves making bricks without straw than following the Cloud through the desert as free men.

Unfortunately, as we follow the Israelites through the Bible, it becomes apparent that their ungodly dependence on Egypt went with them into the Promised Land. Centuries after the Exodus, we find the prophet Isaiah condemning those who continued to trust the Egyptians rather than God Himself.

“Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the LORD!” (Isa. 31:1).

“Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out His hand, both he who helps will fall, and he who is helped will fall down; they all will perish together” (Isa. 31:3).

In the book of Ezekiel, however, it seems that the Lord has had enough of the Egyptian influence on His people and He sends His prophet with a very strong message.

“In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt. Speak, and say, “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, I am against you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt, O great monster who lies in the midst of his rivers, who has said, “My River is my own; I have made it for myself”’”’” (Ezek. 29:1–3).

This prophecy is very specific as to the time in which it was given. Most scholars believe it was before the fall of Jerusalem when there were those among Israel’s leaders who continued to look to Egypt for their deliverance from the Babylonian empire. Unfortunately, the Egyptians did not come through and Jerusalem fell.

Ezekiel is instructed to set his face against Pharaoh, king of Egypt, an unlikely scenario featuring a poor, exiled man with no authority or influence confronting the king of a major military power. But Ezekiel understood his position as the mouthpiece of God. The power of Pharaoh as king of Egypt was nothing when compared to that of God, King of the universe. Ezekiel’s contemporary, Jeremiah, had prophesied against this same Pharaoh:

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies and into the hand of those who seek his life, as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy who sought his life’” (Jer. 44:30).



DELUSIONS OF DEITY

It is interesting that God refers to Pharaoh as the great monster who lies in the midst of his rivers. In Egypt, the great monster who lived in the Nile and its tributaries was well-known as the crocodile. In fact, Pharaoh was sometimes portrayed with the body of a man and the head of a crocodile. He was occasionally even referred to as the Great Crocodile, ferociously protecting the river on which all of Egypt depended.

It is here that Pharaoh's arrogance is clearly revealed, as Ezekiel quotes him as calling the Nile "*my river*" and claiming that he had indeed created it himself. Pharaoh clearly believed that he was in fact a god, and he was somehow able

to convince himself that he had created one of the greatest rivers on earth. The rich soil deposited by the Nile on its banks each year coupled with irrigation from the river itself made the land an agricultural paradise. And selling their bountiful crops was no problem for Egyptian farmers because the river provided a transportation route that took them to markets far and wide. Egyptians actually worshiped the Nile, and Pharaoh as the crocodile god who had created it.

Some translations, however, omit the word "it" in Pharaoh's quote, reading instead, "*My river is my own, I have made myself.*" Not only does Pharaoh thus credit himself with creating the river, but with creating Egypt's gods, including himself. Pharaoh is therefore saying, "I am god. I am the creator of all things. I am all powerful, and all things belong to me."

God's prophecy through Ezekiel continues.

“But I will put hooks in your jaws, and cause the fish of your rivers to stick to your scales; I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers, and all the fish in your rivers will stick to your scales. I will leave you in the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers; you shall fall on the open field; you shall not be picked up or gathered. I have given you as food to the beasts of the field and to the birds of the heavens” (29:4–5).

To this day, crocodiles are caught with very large hooks that sink deeply into their jaws, allowing them to be pulled out of the water onto dry land where they can be marked and released or killed as is necessary. God tells Pharaoh that once He caught the crocodile king with His hooks, he would be thrown onto a field as food for wild beasts. Remembering the importance Egyptian society placed on burial rituals and the afterlife, the threat of this humiliation would seem almost unbearable.



In the rest of Ezekiel's prophecy, God speaks of the destruction of Egypt, describing it as a place where neither man nor beast would pass through, a devastation that would last 40 years during which the Egyptians would be scattered among the nations. But God would be merciful, the prophet says, and return the scattered Egyptians to their land. There is a caveat, however. Egypt would never again be a superpower

among the nations. God calls it the lowliest of kingdoms, and certainly, Egypt has never again risen to such heights of power and influence since Nebuchadnezzar plundered the nation.

The destruction of Egypt at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar would be a seminal point in Israel's history. The Israelites would

at last be freed from their ungodly dependence on Egypt, no longer turning to Egypt for help or looking to Egypt as their deliverer. If Israel saw Nebuchadnezzar's rise to power as happenstance or because of his family history or his own charisma, they would remain in their strange bondage to Egypt. But if they could see it as a tool in the hands of God in the execution of a divine plan, those bonds would at long last be broken.

THE LORD LIVES

Although Ezekiel spent four chapters prophesying against Egypt, he also had a lot to say about Israel. Some of the most beautiful promises in the Bible are found in Ezekiel 28:

“Thus says the Lord God: ‘When I have gathered the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and am hallowed in them in the sight of the Gentiles, then they will dwell in their own land which I gave to My servant Jacob. And they will dwell safely there, build houses, and plant vineyards; yes, they will dwell securely, when I execute judgments on all those around them who despise them. Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God’” (vv. 25–26).

The prophet is seeing a day when God will exact judgment on Israel's enemies—Egypt being one of them—while at the same time pouring out His love on the people He calls the apple of His eye (Zech. 2:8). Though the Jewish state is not without struggles and her enemies continue to trouble her, Israel today dwells in safety that only God can provide, building houses,



planting vineyards, raising children and continuing to come home from the places to which they had been scattered. And slowly but surely, Israel is taking its place among the nations, soon to be hallowed among the Gentiles.

Perhaps as we sit around the Passover table this year, we should tell yet another story, this one from the prophet Jeremiah:

“Therefore behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that it shall no more be said, “The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,” but, “The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.” For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers” (16:14–15).

Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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