

Freedom from Bondage

During the time that the children of Israel were being freed from bondage in Egypt, the Israelites had seen many amazing miracles. Miracles which included the ten plagues, a means by which God was working powerfully to show the Egyptian Pharaoh who was really in control. Shortly after the tenth plague that resulted in the death of all the firstborn of Egypt, God's people left their Egyptian bondage. God went before the children of Israel in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night as they moved closer to the Red Sea. And even then, Pharaoh had not given up on getting the people of Israel back so that they could continue to be his slaves.

As Israel was encamped on the banks of the Red Sea, they looked up and saw the Egyptian army coming toward them and they were terribly frightened! Sadly, even after all the mighty acts of God that the Israelites had seen, they angrily questioned Moses: "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?" Notice how quickly the people challenge God by means of challenging Moses' leadership. These Israelites are operating out of fear rather than faith. Very soon after this, another amazing miracle takes place as the waters of the Red Sea are parted and the Israelites cross over on dry land. In addition to this, they watched as the armies of Pharaoh, including their chariots and horses, are swallowed up by the sea. And still, for many, this is not enough for them to rest in God and trust that his wisdom and power are greater than they could have ever imagined. In a very short time, they'll be complaining again that they don't have what they want to eat and saying that they should have stayed in Egypt where there was plenty to eat. (Exodus 16:3)

Clearly, the Israelites, in the main, were living in fear and not living by faith. Even though they had been given freedom, every time something was hard, they wanted to go back into bondage. It seemed that they could only find a measure of happiness and contentment when their lives were going along comfortably and unchallenged. This should be a reminder to us. Living only for the comfortable and easy life we would choose for ourselves, when it takes us away from what God wants for us as given in his word, is not freedom, it's really bondage.

Today we begin a new series from a very small portion of the New Testament book of Galatians (4:8-11). Paul has been and continues to confront the lives and choices of the South Galatian Christians, many of whom were going against God's Word and believing that this would make their lives better. They seem to have not yet learned that no one will ever find *lasting* joy and *true* freedom from bondage by imagining for ourselves—apart from God's word—what is true, right, and good. I want to begin our look at this passage beginning with Paul's reminder to the Galatian Christians of their former bondage.

"Formerly, when you did not know God....." (Galatians 4:8a) In this section, Paul transitions from addressing the bondage that the Old Testament Israelites had experienced under the law (3:23), to the bondage that had been experienced by these, first century South Galatian Christians *prior to their salvation* in Jesus Christ. Paul declares that there was a time when they

were “enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.” (Galatians 4:8b) Although Paul doesn’t elaborate on what this could mean, we know from the book of Acts that, when Paul was on his first missionary journey with Barnabas, they encountered those who strongly believed in the Greek gods. For example, after arriving at Lystra, there was a man there who had been crippled in his feet from birth and had never walked. As he was listening to Paul preach to the crowds, Paul looked intently at him and said, “Stand upright on your feet.” At Paul’s command this man, crippled from birth, immediately stood up and began walking! Now you can be sure that this was noticed by the crowds. And what did they do? Being pagans, they immediately reverted to the only belief system that they knew. They cried out, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!’ Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.” (Acts 14:11-12) Hermes in Greek mythology is a herald of the gods.

When we continue our look at this passage next time, Paul will make a plea for these Christians to reconsider the foolish choices that they’re making by living for themselves rather than living for God. The *freedom* that we sometimes think is ours will only turn out to be *bondage* if God and his word are not the priority of our lives.

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