

Egyptian Tours

Jeremiah 2:18 NIV

Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Shihor?

Have you gone back to Egypt?

When God called me into full-time Christian ministry, He really did it. It wasn't something I thought about and then pursued. My move into this was not the result of vocational placement testing or advice given me by counselors. I didn't ask my pastor what he saw in me and what my talents were or even my parents when I was on the verge of changing career plans. Because it was such a drastic makeover of my life goals, I had to be very certain of what I was doing. I was leaving the medical field and not going to pursue a degree in chemistry. I wasn't going to attend a state university and I was not about to become rich. I was leaving behind everything I thought I would do with my life and making a clean break of it. The only way I would have willingly departed from everything familiar and comfortable was if God called me out of it all and that was what happened. As clear as the crack of thunder, the voice of God shook my complacency out of me and sent me on my way to a Christian college where I could figure out what He wanted next. There was no way though I could make heads or tails of my life if I stayed in San Leandro and didn't go. I had to leave and stay gone if I wanted God to guide me through the next phase of my life. I made a decision way back then to not return to my Egypt...to that spot where I just figured out everything on my own and did as I wished. I left.

We each have an Egypt; a place that is reassuring and comfortable. For some it is an old way of solving problems. Anger and cursing have worked before. Intimidation and name calling have helped. Perhaps it is partying at the club or just having a stiff drink to relax. It could be turning on the TV and sitting like a zombie watching mindless sitcoms. For others it is spending more than should be spent on things not really needed. Egypt can be a quick check of the horoscope or an intimidating stare at those who are offensive. Egypt might be the expensive restaurant or hours spent wandering through websites. Egypt could be a career God has said to leave or a major He has commanded be dropped. Egypt might be characterized by worrying or complaining or depressed napping. For many of us, Egypt is hoarding or busyness or passive acceptance of anything we are told. Egypt has been cigarettes for some and avoidance for others. Grudges and gossip and jealousy all make a quite nice Egypt as does the quiet sexual immorality that keeps us feeling alive and secure. Egypt is not half-way around the world. It is much too easy to reach and altogether sensible. Never think that Egypt looks bad or seems bad. It is the "best" option which is why we return to it so often.

Egypt was not an ephemeral philosophical topic during the early days of the Bible. It was a specific place with certain obvious and tangible characteristics, just as it is today. But in the time of Abraham and his grandson Jacob, it was not just a real place, it was a place of personal importance and relevant to their well-being. Let's just start with Abraham first. Abraham had been told by the Lord to leave his home in Haran in modern Turkey and move south to a land He would show him. This turned out to be Palestine, the Promised Land. As far as we know, Abraham was never told by God to leave Palestine but he did, going down to Egypt to escape a famine in the land where God told him to settle. Fortunately for Abraham and for Sarah, when they went to Egypt, although Pharaoh found Sarah beautiful, he did not make her his wife because when he tried by adding her to his harem, God sent a plague upon the Pharaoh and his household; scaring the king to death and forcing him to give Sarah back to her husband Abraham. It could be said that Abraham, if it were not for God's intervention, escaped by the skin of his teeth. He nearly lost his wife and his future son Isaac in the process by going down to Egypt. We might not see this as a big deal to God except for the very specific instructions he gave Isaac, Abraham's son one hundred years later.

Once again there was a famine in Palestine and Isaac, like his father, thought it would be a good idea to leave the Promised Land and go down to Egypt where the food was plentiful. This time though God gave Isaac a most definitive command about resettling in Egypt. Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham...So Isaac stayed in Gerar. (Genesis 26:2-6 NIV) Clearly the Lord did not want Isaac in Egypt and although it may have seemed the natural place to go to weather the food shortage in the Promised Land, it was not an option for Isaac. He was to trust God to meet his needs where he was rather than go off searching for some alternative solution that his wife and he might be more

comfortable choosing.

Move forward another hundred and thirty years or so and Abraham's grandson and Isaac's son faced the exact same circumstance. There was a famine in the Promised Land. Joseph had been sold by his brothers into slavery and now nearly twenty years later that same Joseph had risen to second in command of all Egypt. In the entire region, only Egypt still had food because God had warned Joseph to store up grain during seven years of plentiful harvests that came just before a seven year famine. When Joseph offered to take care of his father Jacob along with his siblings and their respective families if they would come down to Egypt, Jacob was given permission by the Lord to go down to Egypt. "I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes." (Genesis 46:3-4 NIV) It is important to note though that this was not a permanent relocation. Jacob and his family were not to stay there. God would be with them while they were there but the Lord would bring Jacob back. Is that what happened though? Did God bring Jacob back to the Promised Land? Not unless we mean his dead body for his sons carried his bones back to Palestine to bury him next to his first wife Leah. Yet there is something else here and it is a deep thought considering God is the God of the living and not the dead. Perhaps God is still going to bring Jacob back to his home, back when the earth is reformed and the new heavens and the new earth are established forever. Perhaps Jacob is still awaiting his return to the place God promised him...ah, we cannot spend time here though.

Even though the famine only lasted five more years, Jacob stayed in Egypt an additional twelve years. This gave his family time to establish themselves in Egypt; root themselves in the land that wasn't to be their home. Perhaps they were to get out long before they did but tarried too long and lost themselves in a land that was never intended to be theirs. Whatever the case, they stayed and stayed and stayed until they found themselves in bondage to the true citizens of the land, the Egyptians. They stayed until they were made slaves and lost their freedom and their dignity as God's people and were forced to live under the rules of the pagan people and were beaten into submission by their rulers and it became so unbearable that they prayed for release, begged for release. They rued the day they settled in Egypt and hated the land of the Nile. They pleaded with the Lord for freedom and their own land and longed for His merciful unbinding. They called out for release. Yet, when they finally were freed and they had God providing for them and they were no longer bound by their captors and all was made right, they despised their freedom; they wanted to return to Egypt. They were afraid of walking with God, frightened of the prospect of trusting in His care, scorned the hope He had for them. They wanted Egypt back.

When they were thirsty they wanted to go back to Egypt. When the Egyptians tried to come after them and retake them as slaves they wanted to go back to Egypt. When they got tired of the Manna God gave them as food on the way to the Promised Land they wanted to go back to Egypt. Even after they were settled back in the Promised Land the hope of a better life in Egypt kept resurfacing. Jeremiah asked them why even after a thousand years of freedom they still wanted to return to Egypt. Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Shihor? Jeremiah 2:18 NIV It was secure in Egypt. It was trouble free in Egypt. It was easy in Egypt. The Promised Land was difficult, a struggle, full of trials. Egypt was fun and exotic and uninhibited. They could be whatever they wanted to be in Egypt. Yet the prophet Isaiah warned the Israelites about going back to Egypt. Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord. Isaiah 31:1 NIV God was so deadest against the people ever returning to Egypt for anything that he warned all kings of Israel to not even send representatives down to Egypt to buy horses. The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." Deuteronomy 17:16 NIV

We can think of Egypt this way. It is everything we revisit that turns us away from God and satisfies us for the moment. It is hard liquor after a tough day, the angry curse words that fly out of our mouths, the extra clothes we don't need, the television shows that distract us, the horoscopes we used to follow, the long work hours we keep to upgrade our house, the ways we used to solve our problems without turning to Christ for help. Egypt is our lack of faith in God; all those things we keep in our back pocket as strategies to make us happy or self-satisfied or smug without needing to trust Jesus. Egypt is our way of avoiding the reality that Satan is our true enemy and Jesus Christ our truest friend. All we seem to want to do is run to Egypt when we are lonely or afraid or angry or disappointed and the Holy Spirit urges us to turn to Jesus Christ and rest in Him alone. He is our place of

happiness. He is the one who will take us out of the wilderness and give us rest. I saw a Facebook post once of a single Christian woman who bragged about having hook-up sex for recreation. That is Egypt. I saw another post by a young Christian woman using filthy language. That is Egypt. I heard about a Christian man who slugged his wife because she was unfaithful. That is Egypt. I read about a Christian young woman who got drunk and hit another car and killed the driver. That is Egypt. I heard a Christian person mocking a co-worker and getting a laugh out of it. That is Egypt. I know of a Christian man who was so lazy he got fired. That is Egypt. Do our spending habits look like we have returned to Egypt? Do our angry outbursts and critical comments make us look like we have returned to Egypt? Does our worry and complaining and half-hearted times of prayer make us look like we have returned to Egypt? Have we given up on reading the Bible as a way of hearing directly from God? Have we returned to Egypt?

There is only one thing we can do if we don't want to return to our Egypt. We must let the Holy Spirit work things out in us and not shy away from it. A Christian who is not going back to Egypt time and again starts to look like Jesus and talk like Jesus and act like Him. But you cannot have this if you rely upon your own willpower and strength. You must depend on the Holy Spirit to guide you and then with the power you have, do what He says. Spend five minutes today, just five minutes in honest holy desire for the Holy Spirit to come upon you. Stay away from Egypt for five minutes and give God a real shot at your heart, building within you a will to live wholeheartedly for Jesus. You already have His power promised to you to do it. It is just a matter of time, time given over to the Holy Spirit to make you ready to live a full life in Jesus.