

76-90

76-There's a really provocative symbol that's evolved as part of the Passover Seder today that all of us would do well to consider for our lives. Early in the ritual people around the table will dip their fingers into the cup of wine and splatter the juice ten times on the plate that sits clean before them. What's up with that? It's a symbol of "tears for Egypt." It's a way of remembering that there were many, many innocent bystanders who paid for the Pharaoh's ongoing obstinance. In this enactment the participants acknowledge that not every Egyptian was as responsible for the whole tragedy as the leadership... and they need to be remembered as victims, too.

77-It's a curiosity that Elijah is such a dominant figure of the Bible. We certainly don't have anywhere near the volume of biography of that man as we of his student and disciple, Elisha. Elisha is recorded as having performed more miracles. Elisha is even recorded as having "performed" a miracle after he was dead! So, why is Elijah so huge? One reason is the lingering prophecy of Malachi 4. That passage guaranteed that Elijah would cast a long shadow. And, it's a prophecy that many of us still need to explore because it still speaks in ways that many have yet to capture I believe.

78-Paul had to go to synagogues before he approached pagans when he went into a new town. He HAD to. But have you ever wondered why? When you track his *modus operandi* in the book of Acts you find this is always the pattern... first to the Synagogue and then out to the streets. I believe it was primarily because of the Jewish bigotry in his age. If he went to the Synagogue and made a few converts there first the pagans didn't care. It wasn't going to affect their receptivity to his message. But, had Paul tried to introduce a gentile "church" into the Synagogue the doors would have been slammed in his face before he could get in the door.

79-It should not be surprising, but Paul grew up, too. It's supposed to work like that and it becomes really evident when you read the writings of Paul in the order in which he wrote them. Granted, we don't perfectly know the chronology but we have a pretty good grasp of it and when you start with I Thessalonians and work your way to II Timothy you find a man who is changing, mellowing, and becoming somewhat more humble... really! But, then again, why should that surprise us? As I said, it's supposed to work that way.

80-Even though God never promised that we'd be immune from trial and persecution and challenge, He still has an ultimate goal- huge blessing. One of the best proofs of that is found in Zechariah 8. In that passage God reveals that His desire for blessing you is related to the influence that your blessing can have on drawing others to God. If and when God brings you blessing His target is not just to make things better for you but in order to attract others to Him. He wants others to see how you progress and have them say, "What do you have that I don't have?" It's an open door to introduce new friends to God when we relate well to our blessings.

81-Judas was not seen as evil by the other disciples. In fact, at times I wonder if they didn't feel some sense of pain and loss over how things evolved that horrible weekend. I believe they lost a friend in Judas. That may be a new thought to you, but I believe its supportable by the words of the disciples themselves. When Jesus shared that a traitor was among them, the Bible records that they all said, "Lord, is it I?" Not one person in the room said, "Oh yeah, we knew that Jesus would eventually unmask you, Judas!"

82-If we want to look at one New Testament church to admire it has to be Antioch. Man, those people just got it right. They are the church that raised funds to send Paul on his way for the first assault of the empire. "We will hold the fort down here, Paul... you go out where we can't go!" Then, when others were trying to rip the church in two they refused to play the game. They immediately appealed to the apostles to help them clarify which side they should land on. Little wonder that this was the church where the name "Christian" was coined. They were the closest thing to "little Christs" that was available!

83-God privileged Peter in a very unusual way. He opened the door to Peter knowing how he was going to die and gave him about 35 years to think about it and prepare for that inevitable fate. What a curious gift that was! In John chapter 21 Jesus clearly revealed Peter's destined fate far in advance of the day and in I Peter chapter 1 the apostle shares that he absolutely understood what Jesus had said and he knew he was closing in on the day of his execution. What a poignant blessing that was for the old fisherman!

84-There's a very logical explanation to how and why things turned sour so quickly for the Hebrews in Exodus 1. When you finish Genesis 50 they are protected and privileged in Egypt. You turn the page and Exodus begins with "a pharaoh who knew not Joseph." History very easily explains this. Joseph went to Egypt at a time when the pharaohs in power were actually not Egyptian. They were an occupying force called "the Hyksos" or "the Shepherd Kings." They were invaders who actually came from the region that had been Joseph's native land so it more easily provided a pathway of acceptance and elevation for Joseph. But, when the invaders were thrown back out of Egypt anyone who looked like the old regime became despised and distrusted and displaced. It's perfectly logical.

85-The land of Goshen, historically, is easily seen to be a target of concern for any Egyptian pharaoh. If you look at the geography of Egypt that northeast region is easily the only territory of risk for invasion. The Sahara is to the west. The Mediterranean is to the north. The vast desert extends to the south and a largely barren Africa for a great distance. To the east there's little population... only that northeast corridor was the access point of invasion throughout Egypt's history. That's where Goshen was. That was the frontier of risk... so you'd better hope that those who populate that land would not be potential allies to an invading force. And, didn't those "Hyksos/Shepherd kings" come from that direction too?

86-Gilgal, Shiloh and Bethel have the lingering notoriety of one thing- once upon a time, randomly, they would host the presence of the tabernacle. Those little villages were (for reasons I don't know) the privileged sites of the Tent of the Lord's presence. We don't know how long it would stay at one village before it went to another. We don't even know, for sure, how it was defined that it was time to move once they were in the land (unlike the actions of the cloudy *Shekinah* in the wilderness.) All we know is that these three villages linger in history as the sites of the Lord's privilege whether or not they ever had any other significance in Israel's history (which Gilgal and Bethel did.)

87-One of Rome's greatest generals only suffered one defeat in his illustrious career and it happened in a little village of the Galilee. Vespasian was successfully subjugating various Germanic tribes when the empire sent him to deal decisively with the brewing mess in Israel. Before that campaign had ended the Romans had destroyed Jerusalem and Vespasian had become the Emperor. But, it was not before he was almost captured in the first battle of Gamla. It was the only blemish on his military career and nearly cost him his life. Astounding.

88-In a very unexpected manner the 10 Plagues of Egypt, in actuality, reveal the astounding mercy of God. I know that sounds preposterous, but I really believe it. If you read the order of the plagues you will discover that God was as gentle as He could be in trying to bring Pharaoh to his senses. You actually get several plagues in before anyone is even horribly inconvenienced. It is late in the series before anyone suffers pain. No human dies until the last plague. Is that a progression of mercy or what?

89-Let me expand the last factoid (#88): You may think that the logic is faulty because the 9th plague is only darkness. But you have to remember you are dealing with Egypt and a culture that holds the Sun as an ultimate deity. The darkness was choking, it was all encompassing, it couldn't be defeated by just lighting a torch or something. The sun "died" in the minds of the Egyptians and the psychological anguish must have been terrible. This next-to-last plague might not have contained the physical challenge of earlier plagues, but the mental pain must have been horrible.

90-The regalia of the High Priest was amazingly colorful and artistic, but there's a lesson to be seen when you look at the big picture of the whole package. Yes, there were layers of blue and purple and gold and other patterns and embroidery, but under it all the High Priest wore the simple, white base layer of the common priest. I think that's so cool!