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The Penultimate Judgment

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt," Exodus 10:21

I read this verse in my reading on Saturday morning past. I follow 'Robert Murray M'Cheyne's Bible Reading Calendar'.

As I read it, certain matters were immediately suggested to me. As with all Holy Scripture, there is prophetic teaching to be observed. The verse is set in the midst of that time when the terrible period of Israel's trial under the cruelty of Pharaoh is coming to an end. God is intervening in answer to the cries of His people as Exodus 2:23-25 tells us. "And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them."

The wonderful story of the Exodus from Egypt has a number of applications and provides us with illustrations of various aspects of God's redemptive purpose.

Most emphatically it brings us to Calvary. There Christ, the true 'Passover Lamb' shed His blood and brought deliverance to His covenant people. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life," Romans 5:10.

But there is also here a picture of that final confrontation between the Lord and the forces and powers of darkness at the end of this age when once again there will arise 'a Pharaoh' who will defy God and seek to destroy God's ancient covenant people, Israel, and the Saviour will return to lead His redeemed into the 'Promised Land' of the Millennial Earth.

It is this aspect of what the verse teaches that I would have us consider.

I. WHAT IS PRONOUNCED IN THIS VERSE IS THE PENULTIMATE PLAGUE.

This is the ninth plague, the plague of **darkness**. I believe we have here a picture of that time which will precede the return of Christ when He will 'pass through the land' and smite the Antichrist and his armies and so deliver His people from the afflictions of that time of tribulation.

Such darkness at the end of this age is predicted in many Scriptures. We are told specifically in Acts 2:16-20 of just such an event.

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come."

Peter is here quoting the prophet Joel so this knowledge was in the possession of God's people long before the 'Day of Pentecost', Joel 2:28-31.

Zephaniah prophetically refers to that darkness.

"The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD:



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the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness," Zeph 1:14-15.

Isaiah is another prophet who deals with the darkness in the approach to the Day of the Lord.

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side," Isaiah 60:1-4.

But there will be a time of **spiritual darkness** before the return of Christ. Indeed, that darkness has already begun to descend upon the people of the earth.

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer," 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

These descriptive terms related to the 'latter times' amount to just one thing - spiritual darkness and ignorance.

There will be a 'departure', verse 1, into darkness and a forsaking of light.

That is surely observable today! Denomination after denomination, church after church, pulpit after pulpit, preacher after preacher, have turned their backs upon God's Word and embraced more and more the 'philosophy and vain deceit, . . . the tradition of men," Colossians 2:8. The old Confessions and Creeds have been abandoned. The very Bible itself, the Book owned of God and mightily used of God in revivals and reformations for hundreds of years, has been cast aside and modern versions with their various perversions of God's truth, have been adopted and that at the bidding of the 'so-called scholars'.

The result? Darkness in which hellish perversions have re-emerged from the depths to which they had been confined under the power of God in those wonderful times of Holy Ghost preaching of the cross over the last two millennia.

This rejecting of God's truth has unlocked the prison house and murder, robbery, sodomy, indeed perversions so unspeakable we cannot mention them, have flooded and swamped the nations. Parliaments, law courts, churches, homes, hearts - have all fallen before this flood of darkness!

Notice that the darkness with which God afflicted Egypt was a darkness that could be 'felt'! It is a darkness so intense that one must 'feel with the hands' in order to go forward. We have no experience of such physical darkness in this day of street lights, moonlight, starlight etc. This is a darkness that is utterly bereft of any light whatsoever. It is called 'thick' darkness in verse 22.

What a darkness it was!

A further description is given us of the darkness in verse 23. "They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days." It was a darkness which left the Egyptians on their own, isolated, without the comfort that comes from the sight of loved ones. Neither could they find relief in work or play. They could not rise to their feet and walk about or find that which their hands could do. It may well have been a darkness that no man-made light could penetrate for the Scripture says that, "They saw not one another"!

It is really beyond our imagination just what utter darkness this was!



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Is that not what is descending upon the earth today? A spiritual darkness that leaves men and women 'groping in the dark', looking for the way forward.

I delight in video documentaries on wildlife. But it vexes me to observe men and women, of obvious intellect, groping in the darkness that comes from a rejection of the Bible's account of creation. I am utterly amazed at the blindness that is upon the 'learned' of this world as they pontificate on how animals, sea creatures and birds were able to develop themselves, physically and mentally, from allegedly 'primitive' creatures to become the largely unfathomably complex creatures that we observe them to be today!

Is not there something of the judgment, threatened to Israel, should they forsake the Lord, seen today? "The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: and thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness," Deuteronomy 28:28-29.

Man, with all his microscopes, infra-red cameras and innumerable other aids with which to study God's creation, merely stumbles further and further into darkness!

This is because unregenerate men and women are as Paul describes them: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart," Ephesians 4:18.

II. IN THE MIDST OF THIS DARKNESS IN EGYPT, THERE WAS LIGHT IN ONE PLACE.

"But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings," verse 23.

Many Christians tremble as they observe something of what is taking place in the earth. They tremble because they do not listen to the Lord but rather seek to make sense of what is happening by the power of their own reasoning and knowledge. That can lead only to fear and trembling.

Listen Christian: ". . . he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," Hebrews 13:5. That is an unbreakable, indestructible, eternal promise to each and every one of God's people.

As the old hymn says:

*Begone, unbelief,
My Saviour is near,
And for my relief
Will surely appear;
By prayer let me wrestle,
And He will perform;
With Christ in the vessel,
I smile at the storm.*

No matter what storms or what darkness comes upon this earth and, Christian, there are dreadful things to happen here as happened in Egypt BUT, through it all the children of God will have light in their dwellings!

I am sure that the grace of God enabled Noah to confidently and excitedly, enter the ark and await whatever the Lord was going to send upon the earth. He knew he and his family were safe in the structure God had designed and into which He had shut them, Genesis 6:15, 7:16.

This was the grace that enabled Paul and Silas to SING amidst their trials in the darkness of that midnight hour in the jail in Philippi, Acts 16:25.

That grace is promised to God's people today and in the future times of darkness.



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"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee," Isaiah 41:10-13.

What a comfort that 'divine light' in the Israelite household must have given. As a voice from heaven awakened the slumbering virgins in Matthew 25:6, so I believe there will be a wonderful communicating of God's comforting grace in the last days of this age to His own believing people. Nothing illustrates this better than that light shining in every Israelite home.

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