

Come to Understanding

**They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24**

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Weeping by the River

Rivers mark important boundaries. Abraham (who was also called Abram) was from “Ur of the Chaldees.” It was located in Mesopotamia, meaning the “land between the rivers,” because it is located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. As the site of the earliest known civilization, it was also called Sumer, the “land of Shinar,” ancient Babel, and Babylon. It is now modern Iraq.

Yahweh took Abraham from Ur, which was located on the east side of the Euphrates River, and brought him to a new land, on the west side of the river, and gave it to him as an inheritance:

7 And he said to him, I *am* Yahweh that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it. -Genesis 15

This promised land, which Yahweh gave to Abraham and his descendents (seed) in a covenant, extended from the Euphrates River on the east to the “river of Egypt” (which is likely the Nile River) on the west:

18 In the same day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: -Genesis 15

At the age of eighty six, Abraham had a son, Ishmael, whose mother was a servant named Hagar (see Genesis 16:16). Isaac was born fourteen years later, when Abraham was one hundred years old. Isaac’s mother was Sarah, Abraham’s wife (see Genesis 21:5).

According to the Bible, Yahweh blessed Ishmael but made Isaac the heir of the covenant that He had made with Abraham:

19 And God said, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son indeed; and you shall call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his seed after him.

20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.

21 But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear to you at this set time in the next year. -Genesis 17

After Isaac had children, Yahweh confirmed that the inheritance was to be passed on to Jacob, who was also named “Israel:”

10 And God said unto him, Your name *is* Jacob: your name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be your name: and he called his name Israel.

11 And God said unto him, I *am* God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of you, and kings shall come out of your loins;

12 And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to you I will give it, and to your seed after you will I give the land. -Genesis 35

Jacob (Israel) had twelve sons. Ishmael’s descendants, however, sold one of Jacob’s sons, Joseph, into Egypt:

28 Then there passed by Midianite merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty *pieces* of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt. -Genesis 37

A famine came into the land of Israel. Jacob’s remaining family then fled into Egypt, where they were miraculously saved from starvation by Joseph, who had risen to a position of authority in Egypt. The family of Israel remained in Egypt. Their descendents, however, eventually became slaves and they remained in Egypt for four hundred years. Israel had lost possession of the land that had been given to them by Yahweh.

Using miracles through the leadership of Moses, Yahweh freed Israel from Egypt. As Moses was leading Israel back to the promised land, Israel grew impatient. Even in their freedom, they longed to return to the land of the river of Egypt:

1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said to them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

3 And why has Yahweh brought us to this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

**So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8**

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4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. -Numbers 14

What was in Egypt that had such a strong attraction for Israel? Was it the security that they had as slaves? Or was it something else?

While Moses was talking with Yahweh, and was away for only forty days, the people of Israel used his absence as an excuse to make the images of gods. They were attracted back to the gods of Egypt!

1 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said to him, Arise, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. -Exodus 32

After forty years of wandering, Israel finally made it to the River of Jordan, the southeast boundary of the promised land. When they came to a place called Shittim, they were again readily persuaded to join in the worship of the images of gods:

1 And Israel stayed in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.
2 And they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.
3 And Israel joined himself to Baalpeor: and the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel. -Numbers 25

After Israel entered the promised land, Yahweh clearly warned them through Moses against worshipping images of any kind:

14 And Yahweh commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might do them in the land where you go over to possess it.
15 Take you therefore good heed unto yourselves; for you saw no manner of likeness on the day that Yahweh spoke unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire:
16 Lest you corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

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17 The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flies in the air,
18 The likeness of any thing that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth:
19 And lest you lift up your eyes unto heaven, and when you see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, should be driven to worship them, and serve them, which Yahweh your God has divided to all nations under the whole heaven. -Deuteronomy 4

After all, Yahweh had taken Abraham from the other side of the Euphrates River to get him away from idol worship:

2 And Joshua said to all the people, Thus says Yahweh God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the river in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. -Joshua 24

East of the Euphrates River, dead leaders were deified, as they were elevated to the status of gods. They were then worshipped as the sun, the moon, the stars, or as images that were believed to have special powers.

However, it was Israel's love for the Babylonian practice of worshipping images, that caused Yahweh to take them back beyond the rivers of Babylon. Stephen explained:

41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.
42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O you house of Israel, have you offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?
43 Yes, you took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which you made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. -Acts 7

Because of idol worship, Israel was taken away from the land of the covenant. They were carried back to the land beyond the Euphrates River, from where Yahweh had first removed Abraham. As they sat by the rivers of Babylon, they could only weep and remember Zion:

1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yes, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
2 We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.
3 For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us gladness, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.
4 How shall we sing Yahweh's song in a strange land? -Psalms 137

If we allow ourselves to be attracted back into the worship practices of spiritual Egypt or Babylon, will we still try to sing the song of Yahweh in that strange land? Or will we weep in repentance?