

The Message

(My Testimony Part 1)

For me “The Message”, even the fact that there was a “message,” snuck up from behind and surprised me.

Back in 1976 I worked as a sales representative for a wholesale paint and wallpaper merchant. I was then also an ordained Presbyterian Elder.

One of the retail shops I sold paint and wallpaper to was the Eltham Paint and Revival Bookcentre, a small family owned business.

I called in one day to find Bill Bailey, the owner reading his Bible.

Being sure of myself I asked the question Stephen had asked the Ethiopian eunuch, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

“Yes,” Bill replied, “I am reading Exodus and seeing how the story of the Israelites journey from slavery to the Promised Land is just like a Christian’s life.”

Well, I had never heard anything like that before. Bill explained.

We are all born in slavery to sin, just as those Israelites were born into slavery to the Egyptians. But then along came a prophet; Moses.

Under God’s command the prophet instituted new times and a new calendar. The new New Year, starts at the first new moon after the northern spring equinox. As the spring equinox is March 21 the first day of the New Year at new moon. In modern western time that could be as late as 17 April or as early as March 22.

Moses told the people to put a perfect lamb aside on the tenth day of this New Year. In the evening of the fourteenth day, the full moon, they were to kill the lamb, cook it, and eat it.

One extra thing that the people also had to do was take the blood of this lamb and sprinkle it on the doorpost and the lintel of their homes. Moses told them that the angel of death would pass through Egypt that night killing the firstborn in every home but when he came to a house marked with the blood of the lamb he would pass over; no one in that house would die that night.

This was, of course the first Jewish Passover.

Once this had happened the people were to walk out of their homes and start their journey to their Promised Land.

This is exactly what a Christian goes through.

Just as there was darkness in Egypt but light of God’s children in Goshen so there comes a time in many peoples’ lives when there is an understanding light, something that allows us to see things that others are blind to. Many feel that there should be, that there is something more; if only we could find it.

Then comes the message that if we accept the death of the Lamb of God as the sacrifice and acknowledge Him as Lord then the angel of death will pass over us; we have eternal life. And Jesus was crucified on the cross when the annual lamb Passover sacrifice was taking place inside the temple. (*Easter then is linked to the Jewish Passover and that is why it changes dates each year; but Back to Bill’s explanation.*)

But that is only the start of a Christian’s walk to the Promised Land. We have to leave our old world, walk away from our old habits, our old selves, and move on.

Soon after our old life tries to drag us back. That is just the same as when Pharaoh and his armies caught up to the Israelites to take them back into slavery.

Now this was a tricky time for Israel. They were trapped. Stuck between two mountain ranges, with Pharaoh and his armies in the only escape route in between, they had their backs to the Red Sea. God now directly intervened. Appearing as a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day He stood between the people and their past life.

Unfortunately too many Christians are still in that position today. Life is a constant nerve racking experience as the powers that controlled their past life seem so close and powerful. God constantly intervenes to protect them. But that isn't the way things are supposed to stay, there is a way out of that position and it is through the water; baptism.

For the Israelites the miracle of the Red Sea was the escape route they needed. But it was far more than that. It was also the solution of the problem and the influence of their past.

Moses opened the Red Sea and the people walked through on the dry sea bed, the water being a wall either side of them. As they walked up onto normal land again Pharaoh and his armies were in hot pursuit. But then the waters closed back drowning Pharaoh and the armies. The power of the past was destroyed and the people were free for ever.

Bill referred to Paul's letters to the Romans and Colossians. Baptism is a burial that destroys the power of the old life and raises us to a new.

By now my head was reeling. I had never heard anything like this before. Bill continued.

Look at the time it took the children of Israel to reach Mount Sinai. They arrived there and received the Ten Commandments 50 days after Passover.

And 50 days after Passover is Pentecost.

At their first Pentecost Israel received the law to live the life. Christians at their first Pentecost they received the power to live the life.

And of course, Bill continued, you can see the different denominations in the story too. The Salvation Army do their work in Egypt, bringing the people to the Passover Sacrifice, the Baptists are at the Red Sea, the Pentecostals at Mount Sinai and so on. But these are only points on the road to the Promised Land. Even Moses couldn't take the people in, Joshua did that. And Joshua is another version of the name Jesus.

Stunned I left the shop. This made the Bible a new book. IF there was that much in Exodus what was in the other books?

Where was the source of this understanding?

Bit by bit, visit by visit, I learnt from Bill that the source was William Branham, an American preacher who had had with dramatic ministry. I wasn't so much interested in miracles, as several people had such gifts, what interested me was the Word, the preaching.

I was always suspicious of American preachers; they often seemed more showmen than committed preachers of God's Word. But this man was humble, he acknowledged his lack of education and his reliance on God. I found that some tapes of sermons by a William Branham were available. These were the old reel to reel type with lots of background noise but I listened to these tapes for a new, clearer, teaching and understanding of the Bible.

What I learnt seemed strange, different, but I found that everything taught was there in the Bible. I couldn't fault it. My many years in the Methodist Church, my seven years in the Presbyterian Church had not prepared me for this.

This was a man of God, and he had a message from God.