

**The Internal Sense Of The Word Part 1.**  
**The deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt and  
their wanderings in the wilderness.**

Whilst it continues to be sold and distributed in vast numbers and keeps its place as the world's best seller, it is probably true to say that no book is regarded more uncertainly today than the Bible is. While believing in it generally, many question much of what is written there. And not only does the questioning focus on its accuracy in all places, but on its relevance as well. The Psalms apart, for they stand in a category on their own, the Old Testament in particular seems to bear little relevance to the religious needs and aspirations of twentieth century man. True, there are instances in it of heroism, faith and trustfulness, but in the minds of many people these are far out weighed by the irrelevance, as it seems, of so much else we find there. Things are said, for instance, of the patriarchs, stories told of the wanderings in the wilderness, and, at the time of the prophets, of the political affairs of ancient Israel that are just not important for us to know. And, as a consequence, the Old Testament, especially, is being increasingly neglected and passed over.

But modern man's estimation of the worth and relevance of the Bible, whether of the Old or the New Testaments, overlooks one tremendously vital and important thing. Within it there lies a deeper, internal meaning which, when known, totally transforms what seems dry and irrelevant into something intensely practical and of concern to us all. We are to regard the stories of the Bible as we regard the Lord's parables - earthly, and in many cases very ordinary stories, within which lie a deeper, spiritual meaning. And it is this which gives these stories their importance for us. Not that they treat and describe events of long ago, because that is not important. But because they have been used by the Lord as vehicles for conveying teaching and instruction which touches upon the lives of every one of us.

"If" wrote Swedenborg "it were not for the veneration for the Divine Word which has been impressed on them, people would say in their hearts (as they are doing) that the Word is not holy ... when yet it is, because an internal sense, which is heavenly and Divine, is in it." (*Arcana Caelestia* 2310<sup>4</sup> ). He also wrote "that all things in the Divine Word both in general and in particular, indeed, the very smallest particulars down to the least iota, signify and enfold within them spiritual and heavenly things." (ibid. 2). This, we note, applies to everything. Every detail. Every story.

It is with reference to the internal sense of the Word that I would like to speak now and to speak of it with particular reference to the story in the book of Exodus, of the liberation of the Israelites from the dominion of the Egyptians and their subsequent wanderings in the wilderness. Few stories so obviously treat deeper things than this one does.

What you probably remember most about it, is the birth of Moses and how he was hidden on the river. Pharaoh's daughter came down to wash and found him there. You may also remember his confrontations with Pharaoh and how at last he led his people out from slavery. We are told of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and of the giving of the Ten Commandments. And much else was involved. There were instances of utter foolishness and backsliding. The people rebelled against Moses, complained about the Lord and wanted to return to Egypt. They were forty years in the wilderness and had many obstacles to overcome.

And yet as a story in itself, it is not important for us to know these things. It may be interesting, but it is not important. What is important about it, however, is that it contains within it a deeper meaning, and that the Lord has used it to speak to us, and to teach us, of spiritual things. The fundamental importance of Swedenborg's theological Writings is that they reveal that meaning to us.

Before regeneration commences, every person is, as it were, a captive of Egypt, a slave, so to speak, to external and worldly things. The natural or earthly side of our nature, with its particular interests and pleasures, is what holds sway with us. We are captivated and enthralled by worldly interests and external pleasures, and pursue our objectives in life from an essentially selfish viewpoint. Egypt represents the external side of life which is fine when kept in its place, but which invariably comes to dominate and enslave us.

The story of the people of Israel in captivity in Egypt is in itself a parable, the deeper or inner meaning of which concerns man's enslavement, as at the beginning, to the selfish and worldly side of his nature. What is represented in their predicament is a bondage which we also experience, but one from which, as with them, there can be deliverance. The fact is that though things are as they are, the Lord in His mercy preserves within us a knowledge of His teaching which, though we would incline to stifle and destroy it at times, grows to maturity and is at last able to present itself as the means of our escape. And that knowledge of the Lord's teaching is what is meant by Moses.

We remember the story how Moses was preserved from destruction and nurtured for duty much later on. So too the knowledge of the Lord's teaching, learnt as it most often is when we are young and as children, is also miraculously preserved and nurtured for use with us much later on.

The break from slavery isn't of course easily made. We remember the strife, and how long and drawn out it was before, in the end, the Pharaoh was compelled to let the people go. External interests and pleasures; selfish habits that have come to get a grip on us; don't readily relinquish it. And, even when the break has been made we sometimes wonder, as did the people of Israel, as to the worth of it all. Though we try to follow the Lord's teaching we are tempted to look back and to think that life was easier and more pleasurable when we were still in Egypt or, in other words, when our lower natures governed and controlled us. We find that more is asked of us than we anticipated, and that trials come upon us in our journeyings which we had not known would be there.

As I said earlier, few stories of the Bible so obviously treat of deeper things than this one does or better illustrate the presence within of an internal, spiritual meaning. As with the people of Israel we shall know moments of discouragement and times when our strength and willingness to persevere seems to fail us. Like them we shall be tempted to abandon the effort and to rebel against the leading of the Lord's truth as they rebelled against Moses. Each incident has something to teach us. Every detail enfolds within it an internal meaning.

It would be wrong to portray the wanderings of the people of Israel in the wilderness and under Moses' leadership in terms which suggest unending rebellion or discontentment. It wasn't. In the same way the path which leads to heaven is not for us, one of unending rebellion, strife and discontentment. The people of Israel in the wilderness knew times of rest, peace and harmony with the Lord. And there are times when we know these things also. Rest, peace and harmony with the Lord. So too, they had glimpses of the Promised Land, And in the same way we are given glimpses now and again of heaven, and of the blessings of the heavenly and totally unselfish way of life.

Each incident connected with those wanderings has something significant to teach us; every detail enfolds within it an internal meaning. And this is what is important about the story. This is where the Word of God as a whole comes into its own, that through it the Lord speaks to us of these deeply important and significant issues, all affecting us, all touching upon our lives in some way. As Swedenborg wrote

“The Word of God is Divine principally in this - that each and all things in it do not regard one nation or people, but the universal human race.”

*(Arcana Caelestia 3305-2)*

That within it is contained Divine truth and teaching which applies to the lives of everyone of us.

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