

Orville and Wilbur Wright are remembered today as the fathers of modern aviation. But if we were to be able to talk with Carrie Kayler, who was the cook and housekeeper for the 2 bachelors at 7 Hawthorne Street, we would discover that they were normal brothers. In fact, Orville and Wilbur probably fought more than normal brothers do. Carrie remembers them arguing vehemently almost every night - even as adults. The arguments would usually start just after dinner. The brothers would be sitting in the living room while she was doing the dishes and one would disagree with the other. Their voices would get louder and louder until they would be shouting at one another. Finally, exhaustion would lead to a welcome lull. But then, one or the other would say *tis*, and the other would respond *tis not*, and off they would go again. Night after night, it was the same pattern.

But then one night something happened to change that pattern. Both brothers were out for the evening in separate directions. Orville, who was 4 years younger, came home first. He was in bed when Wilbur got home, but not asleep. Orville didn't hear the bolt slide back into the front door when Wilbur came in. So after Wilbur got into bed, Orville got up to lock the door. As he was locking the door, he had a strange feeling. Something was wrong. So he began to check around the house. As he came near Wilbur's room, he noticed his brother already asleep from exhaustion. Then he heard it - the soft hissing of escaping gas. Holding his breath, Orville rushed into the room, followed the hissing to the blown out gaslight, and closed the jet. The deadly hissing ceased immediately. Then he rushed over to the window and flung it open. The commotion woke his brother who now became very aware of what was going on. The 2 brothers now unable to sleep with their adrenaline flowing sat together and talked for hours about their narrow escape.

Carrie the housekeeper noticed a difference the very next night after dinner. And that difference continued night after night in the future. For Orville and Wilbur stopped arguing with each other so much after that near tragic event. Instead, they joined their efforts in a far greater harmony. And eventually, these 2 brothers took us with them into the sky.

It happens many times in life that tragedy or near tragedy brings about some unexpected progress in life. Perhaps it is because the tragedy forces people to examine their priorities in life. Perhaps it is because the tragedy brings people together in greater unity. Perhaps it is because the tragedy results in a greater appreciation for others. Whatever the reasons, it often happens that tragedy or near tragedy precedes progress.

The group of outcasts living in Goshen who were called the Hebrews must have cursed the day when the Hyksos People took over the Egyptian throne. It was shortly after that day that the Hebrews became slaves. For several generations they had to build buildings for their Egyptian oppressors under the threat of the scourging whip of their cruel foremen. And when the oppression became greater and greater, they must have wondered why their God had deserted them. This lifestyle was more than they could bear. But it was out of this apparent tragedy that a nation was born. For the Israelites would have never left the comfort and security of living in the most powerful nation of the world in their day unless they were forced to. Like the mother eagle who pecks the soft animal fur out of the nest

exposing the sharp sticks and thorns when it is time for the baby eaglets to leave the nest and learn how to fly, so God allowed apparent tragedy into the lives of the Hebrew people so that a new nation could be born.

We have been looking at the top ten World's Greatest Events during these past Sunday mornings. These are events that have changed the course of the world. We have already seen:

- \*creation - when all of the material universe came into existence

- \*Adam and Eve's fall into sin - when wickedness and all of its consequences distorted the perfect world that God had created.

- \*the Flood - when every air-breathing being was drowned except for 8 humans and 2 of every kind of animal kept alive in the ark.

- \*the Tower of Babel - when national identities and languages were formed.

Now we come this morning to the formation of the specific nation of Israel. And you might be wondering, why chose the formation of this single nation as one of the World's Greatest Events? What about the formation of the Edomites or the Moabites or the Ammonites of whom we are told of their origin? What about the formation of much more powerful and stronger nations like Ancient Egypt or Greece or Rome or even our own country? Why not choose the signing of the declaration of independence to be in the top ten list of significant world events? Why choose the formation of a relatively tiny nation that has never expanded to more than 15 million or so people as one of the world's greatest events?

Well, I think that these questions will be answered as we discuss the formation of the Israelites together - for the inception of this nation has 2 very special distinctives that set it apart from other national origins. First, Israel was born out of an event that revealed the great power and awesome nature of the true and living God. And second, it was from the formation of this tiny nation that spiritual salvation would eventually come to the human race.

Now we have a couple of passages that we could study in examining the birth of the nation of Israel. We could turn to Genesis 12 and look at the call of Abram by God - in some ways, this is when the nation started. Or we could turn to the later chapters of Genesis and look at the family of Jacob and his 12 sons for each of these sons became one of the tribes of the nation of Israel. But I have chosen to look with you at the event that we remember today as the Exodus. For up to this time, the children of Abraham were really just a large, extended family. But following this event and the giving of the law and constitution from Mt. Sinai, the Israelites became a nation.

We don't have time to read the entire account of the Exodus this morning. Let me summarize the story briefly for you.

- \*You will recall that God used Joseph to deliver his chosen people from the great famine that was so devastating to the middle east. Joseph had been sold into slavery by jealous brothers and taken into Egypt. But God had supernaturally caused Joseph to rise from being a prisoner to a ruler by revealing the Pharaoh's dreams to him. Now when the family of Jacob needed food, Joseph was in a position to help them. And Joseph persuaded the entire group of Abraham's descendants to migrate down into Egypt where they would live in the land of Goshen. This was very important for the Israelites would probably never have remained distinct as a nation in the land of Canaan. Do

you remember the story of Dinah in Gen. 34? The children of Jacob were in great danger of intermarrying with the Canaanites and losing their distinctive identity. So God put the Israelites in a position where they could develop a national identity. The Egyptians regarded the Israelites as inferior people - they were just shepherds. But they had respect for them at first because of Joseph's contribution to Egypt. So the Egyptians isolated the Israelites in the land of Goshen. The result was the Israelites through no real desire of their own were forced to become a distinct people.

For some 400 years, the Israelites remained in Egypt until they were several million strong. During that time, their circumstances changed greatly. They fell from favor and became slaves. As Egypt became a greater and greater world power, the children of Abraham became more and more entrenched in slavery. Finally, the situation became so severe that they cried out to God for deliverance.

In answer to their prayers, God raised up a leader by the name of Moses. Moses was the perfect man for the job. He was a Hebrew by birth, but had been raised as a foster child in the palace of Egypt. So he both had the heritage of the Israelites and he knew the protocol and etiquette of the Egyptians. The Egyptians, of course, were unwilling to just let the Israelites go. For one thing, there probably have never been a more arrogant people than these ancient Egyptians - they were the most powerful people on the face of the earth and they knew it. But also, they had a large pool of slave labor who was building cities for them. It was to their financial advantage to keep the Israelites around. But it was necessary for the Israelites to now establish their own distinctive national identity if they were to become the nation that God wanted for them to be.

In order to bring this proud nation to the place where they would be willing to let the Israelites go free, God used Moses to execute 10 painful and disastrous plagues upon the land of Egypt. These plagues were: turning water in the Nile River into blood, bringing millions of frogs into the land, covering the earth with lice, filling the air with flies, bringing a dreaded cattle disease that would kill off livestock, causing a painful epidemic of boils to cover the Egyptians, raining down hail from the heavens to destroy their crops, covering the earth with locusts to eat up the next start of crops, blanketing the land of Egypt with a thick darkness, and killing the firstborn of every family.

These plagues probably occurring over a period of about 6-7 months systematically demoralized the Egyptian people and thrust their nation into economic depression. They were designed to be progressively more severe. The first 4 plagues were just very unpleasant, a nuisance. But then the 5th plague started to pick at the pocketbook with material loss. The 6th plague became very personal with physical discomfort. The 7th and 8th brought about great economic disaster for the country. The 9th was extremely demoralizing to the psychological state of the Egyptians. And the final plague brought great grief to families and finally broke their spirit.

Now I want you to notice with me several reasons why the Exodus must rank as one of the World's Greatest Events in my opinion:

1. It was at this time that God proved himself to be an absolutely faithful God keeping the covenantal promises that he had made to Abraham.

In Genesis 12:1-3, we have recorded a great promise that God had made to Abraham. *The Lord had said to Abram, Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you*

*into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.*

Now, to be very frank, during Abraham's lifetime it didn't appear that God was going to fulfill this promise. Abraham obeyed God and left the security of his home in Mesopotamia to go to the land of Canaan. But when Abraham died, he didn't own any land there in Canaan except for one cave that he had bought to bury his wife, Sarah. And Abraham had purchased that cave with his own money, God hadn't given it to him. And the sum total of Abraham's descendants that God had promised him was one son named Isaac and 2 grandsons, Esau and Jacob, that were born 15 years before Abraham's death - hardly a great nation. But Abraham believed the promise of God. And God is always faithful to His word.

Did Abraham ever doubt God's promises to him? Of course he did. Paul writes in Romans that *against all hope, in hope Abraham believed (Rom. 4:18)*. Abraham had his times of spiritual struggle. But he chose to accept the word of a faithful God and believe it to be true. And that is what made Abraham the father of faith. So even today, we don't always see God's promises fulfilled immediately. But we can count on them for God is always faithful to do what he promises to do.

2. But there is a second reason for the exodus being one of the world's greatest events. It was at this time that God demonstrated his awesome power in a very public way.

Now we have to remind ourselves of the historical setting here. Egypt was by far the world's most powerful empire. There was nobody who could stand with Egypt in these days. And Israel was just a motley band of slaves. They weren't trained militarily - they didn't even have any weapons. For Israel to stand up to Egypt was a joke - a literal joke.

Periodically, we have a situation here in our nation where a small, militant group defies established law and order. David Koresh led such a group down in Waco Texas some years ago. I can remember several groups of militia or native Americans who have barricaded themselves against authorities. Periodically a small group of terrorists will take some hostages and make some demands for their release. Right now there is a group of Christian Korean missionaries who are being held by Taliban terrorists in Afghanistan for whom we are praying for their safe release. 2 have already been executed by these violent militants. Now, whenever these situations arise, we tense up. We are concerned that innocent people are not unnecessarily killed. We pray for a peaceful resolution. We are watching to make sure that human rights are not violated. We are hoping for restoration of law and order. But nobody is actually worried that our government might fall. Nobody expects to wake up in the morning to read in the paper, *Government overthrown, Taliban has now taken over the U.S.*

But that is the type of shock that it would have been to the Egyptians when the Israelites forced their hand. They had never even considered the Israelites to be a threat before. Unlike the Taliban, the Israelites weren't even armed. They didn't have any weapons at all. They were just a group of slaves who lived in Goshen. Few people even knew that they existed. And suddenly, they were bringing the most powerful nation in the world to her knees. How could this possibly happen? It was only by the power of a great and mighty God. And that brings us to another

important consideration.

3. There was a reason why God delivered the Egyptians in the manner that he did. God executed the plagues SO THAT HE COULD PROVE HIMSELF TO BE THE SUPREME GOD IN THE MOST PUBLIC WAY POSSIBLE.

Let me read to you a very interesting verse found in Exodus 12:12. Speaking to Moses, God says, *On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn - both men and animals - and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. For I am the Lord.*

Now this is very significant for it helps to answer the questions that we have in our minds about the plagues. Why plagues? Why 10? Why these 10? I mean, frogs and lice and flies? We would think that God could think of something better than these?

But then we begin to understand the ancient middle eastern culture. Every nation except for Israel was polytheistic in these days - they worshiped many gods. And these gods were pictured in many forms as idols. The general rule was that you knew how strong a god was by how strong the people who worshiped him were. It's logical, isn't it? So in Moses' day, there was no question in the world about who the strongest gods were. They were Egypt's gods, because Egypt was the strongest nation.

Now it shouldn't surprise us that the 10 plagues were directed against 10 of the strongest gods that Egypt worshipped. And the specifics of the plagues were directed against the visible manifestations of those gods. We don't have time to go into the specifics of each plague, but there are some excellent books written on this subject if you are interested in them. But suffice it to say, that the plagues were a personal duel between the true and living God and the false gods that the Egyptians worshipped. God was demonstrating himself to be superior to the gods of Egypt.

4. But we must conclude now with a final, very important reason for the Exodus qualifying as one of the top ten world's greatest events. We are going to be developing this theme more as our series goes on so we will not dwell at length with it here, but will just mention it. The Exodus and the nation of Israel that came out of that event formed an environment out of which God could bring salvation to the entire human race. This was the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that through him the entire world would be blessed. This is what makes the nation of Israel unique in the final analysis. It is the fact that God used this tiny, insignificant nation to be the vehicle of his plan for the redemption of the human race. It was in God's mind from the beginning to provide a way of deliverance for a human race that had become mired in sin and wickedness. A satisfactory sacrifice for sin was the only means possible for this to occur. Being perfect in holiness and righteousness with standards absolute in perfection, God could not enjoy the race that he had created to fellowship with unless the sin question was first settled. So God formed a plan. His plan centered around an incarnation of himself in human form. God was going to come and dwell in a human body. Now in order to do this, God had to have a suitable environment prepared. So God called out a man to start a nation from him. This would be the national setting in which the Messiah would be born. And then God carefully prepared a lineage out of which His son could be born. Then God began to prepare the world - the Greeks brought a wonderful culture and language that was just right to be the vehicle for God's redemptive message; the Romans brought stability and order to the world as well as a world-wide transportation network that would allow for the spread of the

redemptive message throughout the world. And, according to the words of the Apostle Paul in Gal. 4:4, When the fullness of time had come, God came in human form.

God has taken great pains to provide redemption for us. This shows how important this matter is to God. He is concerned for us. He desires to have fellowship with us. Have you received God's gift of redemption into your life?