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God Remembered His Covenant with Abraham 2: 23-25

God remembered His covenant with Abraham DIG: What is the big picture of these verses? Why did Moshe go back to Egypt? Had God forgotten the Israelites? What might have been the reason for their four hundred years of suffering? How did God's remembering set the stage for the redemption of Isra'el?

REFLECT: When has God remembered you after a particularly difficult time in your life? Have you been able to serve Him afterward? When God looks upon you, He is concerned about you. Sometimes we believe that by experience, and other times we have to believe that merely by faith. Where are you with that right now?

These verses summarize the next forty years in which **Thutmose III** was ruling **Egypt** after **Hatshepsut** died, the same forty years that **Moses** was a shepherd in the land of **Midian**. Being a shepherd was looked down upon by **the Egyptians**, but esteemed by Jews. So **Moses** was eventually content to be a shepherd since **he** identified **himself** as a Jew and not an **Egyptian**.

For a moment, the scene shifts back to **Egypt** where the writer reminds us of the big picture. After forty years of ruling and reigning, **Thutmose III, the king of Egypt**, had **died**. That paved the way for **Moses** to return to **his** homeland. **The Lord** would later tell **His prophet**, "**Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead**" (4:19). But even though a new pharaoh, **Amenhotep II**, was ruling, **the Hebrews** remained under severe oppression. **Amenhotep II's** mummy has been found and shows **him** to be a man of powerful physique. One of the inscriptions on **his** burial coffin also praises **him** for **his** physical strength. **He** proved **his** cruelty when, after a victory over Syria, **he** carried seven Syrian leaders upside-down from the bow of **his** ship on the trip up the Nile, after which **he** personally sacrificed them.³⁰ It was under this pharaoh that **the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for rescue from slavery went up to the ears of God (2:23)**. Only then did **they** turn to **the**

LORD. But we should not forget that **Isra'el served other gods** while **they** were in **Egypt (Joshua 24:14; Ezeki'el 20:5-10, 23:2-3, 8, 19, 21 and 27)**. This might have been the reason for the delay. Being involved in deliberate, active sin separates us from **Him** and can delay **His** acting on our behalf.

The chapter concludes with reflections upon **God's** deep concern for **His people**. Nearing the conclusion of over four hundred years of subjugation, humiliation and frustration, **ADONAI** now begins to initiate the plan of redemption and freedom for **His** covenant **people**.³¹ But even though **the LORD** had been silent up to this point, **He** was not indifferent. Even amid the misery of **their** backbreaking labor, **YHVH** was there. Even though we do not read of **God** speaking in the first two chapters, **He** was, nevertheless, listening. Indeed, **He** was silent. But in **His** silence **He** was accomplishing **four** important things.

First, Ha'Shem was in the process of disciplining **His children** (see the commentary on **Hebrews, to see link click Cz - God Disciplines His Children**). When **Jacob** first went down to **Egypt, he** went with the intention of merely visiting there. It was supposed to be a temporary stay. But the temporary stay turned into a permanent dwelling. **Isra'el** began to be enticed by whatever attractions **Egypt** had to offer. In short, **they** began to assimilate into the **Egyptian** culture. But instead of settling down and building houses, **the children of Isra'el** should have been making plans to leave **Egypt** as soon as possible. In all fairness, **they** were living in some of the most fertile land in all of **Egypt**, just on the eastern edge of the Nile River delta. In a time famine, at least there was water and grazing land for **their** flocks. Nevertheless, Canaan was the Promised Land. **The children of Isra'el** should have left the land of temptation and come up to **their** Promised Land.

Instead, by remaining in **Egypt, the people** made **themselves** completely vulnerable to all of **Egyptian** culture, which, apparently, **they** began to participate in. Because of this **God** was in the painful process of disciplining **His children**. Throughout **her** history, every time **Isra'el** fell into the sin of assimilation, **she** always ended up in **slavery**, as **she** did in **Egypt**. The Jews of pre-World War II Germany were, perhaps, one of the most assimilated of all Jewish generations. All of us know the horrible outcome resulting in slavery in the death camps. Assimilation, therefore, invariably, leads to moaning and **groaning**.

Second, God's apparent silence caused some deep spiritual growth in **the people of Isra'el**. This is the first time in the Torah since the story of Adam that a single individual is not at the center of the story. That changes later in Chapter Two where

Moshe comes to the forefront. But in the beginning of **Exodus**, it is not an individual, but **a people** who are in the limelight – the descendants of **Abraham**. **Exodus** tells us how **God** prepared **Isra'el** for **His** redemption, and for **His** planned nationhood for **them**.

This process is described by Scripture as a refining process. It pictures **the children of Isra'el** as a piece of precious metal such as gold, and the harsh **slavery** as the metal refiner where impurities are burnt away and the pure precious metal is left. Other Scriptures also refer to the **slavery** story by these terms. For example: **He brought you out of the iron furnace of Egypt to be His people (Deuteronomy 4:20)**. **Isaiah** also expressed it in a similar manner: **Look, I have refined you, but not [as severely] as silver; [rather] I have tested you in the furnace of affliction (Isaiah 48:10)**. Hence, there had to be moaning and **groaning** on **Isra'el's** part. It was **God's** way of preparing **them** to be **a nation**. It was, as many would say today, “No pain, no gain!” **James** said it this way: **Regard it all as joy, my brothers, when you face various kinds of temptations; for you know that the testing of your trust produces perseverance. But let perseverance do its complete work; so that you may be complete and whole, lacking nothing (James 1:2-4)**. Thus, in **their** terrible **slavery**, **YHVH** was using the refining process. **He** was perfecting **a people** in holiness and in the process, preparing **a nation**.

Third, there was an educational purpose. Through **their slavery** in **Egypt**, **ADONAI** was teaching **Isra'el** many “object lessons” which could be used to teach profound spiritual truth. There are many such lessons throughout the Torah. One such object lesson is found in the concept of being **a stranger**. For example, **the LORD** tells **His people**, **“Do not wrong a stranger and do not oppress him, for strangers you were in the land of Egypt” (22:20)**. How was **Isra'el** to know how to treat **a stranger**? One very moving and assured way would be remembering what it was like when **they** were **strangers in Egypt**.

Fourth, **ADONAI** was preparing **the children of Isra'el** for redemption. They would never know the depth of **God's** mercy if **they** did not experience the hopeless bondage of **slavery**. **They** could not fully understand the freedom of redemption if **they** had never experienced the shackles of **servitude**. In this **servitude** and the preparations for redemption, **ADONAI** was beginning to paint a carefully crafted portrait of the person and work of **Yeshua**, our **Deliverer**, our **Redeemer**, who set us free from the **slavery** of personal sin. **It is for freedom that Messiah set us free- so stand firm** and receive it. It's your choice. **And do**

not be burdened by a yoke of slavery to legalism **again**, or think that's going to give you a right standing before **God (Galatians 5:1)**. We are **sinner**s by nature and sinners by choice. But now, because of **His** sacrifice on the cross, we have a new choice. Now because of the indwelling of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** we can say no to **sin**. In **the Egyptian** slavery, **God** was busy painting the picture of the hopelessness, the horrors, the bondage, and the futility of **slavery** to self and **sin**. This is needed to convince **sinner**s of **their** need for personal redemption found in **the One** who is **greater than Moshe, Yeshua** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Ao - The Superiority of Messiah to Moshe**). **The Jewish groaning** was made worse by **ADONAI's** apparent silence. But even though it seemed like **God** was staying aloof during **the Israelite slavery in Egypt . . . He** was not inactive. **He** told us that **He**, indeed, **heard the groaning** of **their** suffering in **slavery**. Consequently, **He** was accomplishing significant redemptive things that most would not have noticed.



God heard their groaning and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob (2:24). Of course, **YHVH** never forgot the covenant! Moshe was simply writing from a human perspective. The word **remembered** is not merely a matter of recall. The Hebrew word carries with it the additional idea of *acting upon the remembrance*. Therefore, the point here is that **YHVH** not only remembered **His** covenant promises to the patriarchs, *but He was ready to act and fulfill those promises.*³² There was not merit involved. Whatever **ADONAI** did for

them was purely for two reasons. First, it was out of **His** grace and mercy. Secondly, as this verse points out, it was because of **His** promise to **the patriarchs**, not because of merit. **The LORD** had promised **their forefathers** that **the Israelites** would become a great nation (**Genesis 12:2**), and **He** had formalized that promise by making a **covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:18, 17:17), with Isaac (Genesis 17:19) and with Jacob (Genesis 35:11-12)**. On the basis of those solemn promises, **God** was about to demonstrate that **He** never forgets **His covenant** promises.³³

So God saw the children of Isra'el (2:25a). Of course **the LORD** saw the physical things. It was a sad and messy sight of miserable beaten **slaves** in complete subjection to the Pharaohs. But these things anyone could see. What did **God see** that no one else could **see**? One thing **He** saw was the possible doubts in some of the minds of the older **Israelites**. **They** remembered the promises of **the patriarchs**. But **they** may have also been wondering if **God** remembered! Thus, conceivably, **ADONAI's** faithfulness was at stake here in the minds of some people. Perhaps that is one reason why we are told that **God remembered His covenant** promises.

Something else **God saw** was the extent to which sin and unbelief had dominated **the children of Isra'el**. One example is in **2:13-14** where **Moshe** tried to intervene between two **Israelites** who were fighting. **They** would not accept any mediation and only mocked **Moses** when **he** tried to offer justice. To be sure, not all sense of right and wrong had disappeared from among **the people** (see **Ah - So God Was Kind to the Midwives**). But, **Isra'el** was sorely in need of judicial instruction. Hence, **ADONAI** began a process which would ultimately lead **them** to Mount Sinai and the reception of the Torah.

Most of all, **God saw** a real mess. **He** saw the cruelty of the **Egyptian** kings. **He saw** the hopelessness of the **Hebrew slaves** which caused **them** to cry out to **Him**. When the Bible says that **God saw** it means that **He** took notice of **their** miserable state and was moved with compassion to do something to correct it. Through this we learn that **God** is not a cold, harsh **God** who only acts to keep a promise. **He** is real, and **He** is moved to compassion, mercy, and love for **His people**.

And God knew (2:25b). The Hebrew word translated **knew** is from the root *yada*, which means *to know*. This hints at more than mere intellectual knowledge. It is a word, for example, which is used in connection with a marriage relationship,

specifically a sexual relationship. Thus, it sometimes speaks of a deep intimate personal knowledge. When we read that **God knew** we are to understand that there were some things about the situation of which only **God** had intimate knowledge.³⁴

*It is comforting for us to realize that **God** does not forget us, or the promises **He** has made to us. **He** remembers us because **He** is near to us. **He** maintains a close personal relationship with, and attachment to us. **He** truly knows us and has an intimacy with what we endure, whether it be trials, suffering or temptations.*

The book of **Hebrews** tells us that this is the work of **Christ**. **For this reason He had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:17-18)**. And, again, the author to **the Hebrews** comments: **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have One who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15-16)**. The **God** of the Bible is not distant, or far removed, from the righteous who believe in **Him**. **He** is close to **His people**, running the universe for their good and for **His** glory.³⁵ Therefore, the stage is set. The next act of the drama of **Isra'el's** redemption is about to be made known. How, then, will **ADONAI** buy back **His people**?