Creation, Exodus and Freedom

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EDITORIAL . . .

“Don’t be afraid. God has heard the boy crying. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand for I will make of him a great nation” (Genesis 21:17, 18).

This is how the Lord spoke to Hagar when Sara had banished her from her home; together with Ishmael, Hagar’s child whom Abraham had fathered. That God did not prohibit Hagar and Ishmael’s ejection from Abraham’s house speaks of Isaac’s God appointed role in the world; not of God’s abandonment of Ishmael. Indeed, some of God’s language regarding Ishmael is identical with words used in His promise to Abraham and Isaac (compare Genesis 15:5 with 16:10).

God does not endorse Sara’s harsh treatment of her handmaid. She and her husband shut their ears to the cries of the two outcasts, but not God. He sees and hears (compare 16:11, 13; 21:17; Exodus 3:7, 16). God is not committed exclusively to any one individual or group. He is the God of Adam—mankind.

The fifteenth chapter of Genesis foreshadows the Egyptian bondage of Abraham’s descendants. In chapters 16 and 21, Sara, God’s elect, mistreats her bond woman who happens to be an Egyptian. Israel’s mistreatment at the hands of Pharaoh is thus anticipated in miniature—and in reverse. In this case the oppressor is the oppressed.

Furthermore, when Ishmael and Hagar languish in the desert, they portray Israel’s future wilderness ordeal. The familiar language and motifs of Israel’s desert wanderings are present in this drama. The woman and her son endure hunger and thirst. Water is miraculously supplied (Genesis 21:15-17).

Hagar, the Egyptian, endures the hardship, abuse, and sorrow that the children of Israel will subsequently experience under the rod of Pharaoh. Moreover, the mercies of God that will later be shown to His chosen people are the self-same mercies that are here brought to Hagar and her son.

God is ever the God of the weak, the abandoned, the outcast, sidelined and friendless. He hears their cry and comes to their rescue. God is better than those whom He—for His own reasons—chooses for certain tasks. In the world there are individuals, movements or groups that God appears to have appointed to serve His purposes. Christian denominations are among these. Many have had a long history with God. Notwithstanding, they sometimes fail to appreciate the true intentions of the God who appointed them. They think that God has attached Himself to them; that His purposes are limited to His activity among them. They fail to realize that God is just as gracious, and just as involved, in other agencies.

Jesus appointed twelve men and sent them out as His messengers. While they were gone, they met other people who preached in Jesus’ name. They said to Jesus: “we told them to stop because they were not with us. Don’t tell them to stop, said Jesus. Whoever is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:38 & 39).

The God of Abraham and Sara is also the God of Hagar and Ishmael. There are none that He loves more than us—and none that He loves less.

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The God of Exodus is the God of Genesis.
The first book of Scripture ends with the relocation of Jacob and his house from Canaan to Egypt. This is possible because of Joseph’s providentially arranged influence at the Egyptian court. Scripture’s second book, Exodus, takes up the story of God’s sponsorship of Jacob’s family where Genesis left off.

Importantly, Yahweh, the God of the Exodus, is the Creator-God of Genesis. In His desert encounter with Moses at the burning bush, He introduces himself as the God of Moses’ fathers; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 3:6). He announces that He is about to fulfill His covenant promise made to Abraham (Genesis 15:17-19).

God’s Intention for Humanity from the Beginning.
In the first verses of Exodus, we learn that Jacob’s children prospered in the land of Egypt:

Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly, and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them (Exodus 1:6, 7).

‘Being fruitful, multiplying, and filling the earth,’ are expressions that first occur in Genesis 1:28 where God spoke to Adam and Eve. They are repeated to Noah at the new beginning after the flood (Genesis 9:1, 7); to Abraham (Genesis 17:2, 6); to Jacob (Genesis 35:11), and to Joseph (41:52). The blessing of God, intended from the beginning for all humanity, is reiterated to successive chosen individuals and their families. Prospering in Egypt, Israel enjoys God’s faithfulness to His original intention for humanity.

A Spoiler Appears.
As in the story of Eden, a spoiler arises to challenge God’s plan. “Then a new king who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt” (Exodus 1:8). That is to say: this king does not recognize the God of Joseph; the God who created the world, and who spoke to Joseph’s fathers, and who permitted Joseph to be enslaved in Egypt so that Israel should be preserved, and God’s plan realized in them.

The recalcitrant king, appealing to prejudices in his own people, begins a program to dismantle the will of God for Israel:

“Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous, and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave our country” (Exodus 1:9, 10).

The king of Egypt (Pharaoh) sees Israel as a threat to his power. He easily persuades the Egyptians that they have something to lose by allowing Israel to continue unsanctioned. He enslaves them; permitting them to continue in Egypt only as subjects of the Egyptians. The good life that God intended is disrupted. Existence as it was meant to be (men and women enjoying the fruits of the earth, as it yields to their husbandry) is vandalized. The mandate to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ is revoked and replaced by another in which some, in their strength, maintain others in weakness; allowing them to exist only as their toils further their own bondage and strengthen the hand of their oppressors.

So they put slave masters over them with forced labor... and they worked them ruthlessly.
They made their lives bitter with hard labor... (Exodus 1:11-14).

Pharaoh is Still Alive.
In general terms, the present world is organized along the lines of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. There are a few powerful rulers; the masses live in comparative weakness. Ruling elites, military regimes, dictators and corrupt governments wallow in luxury while their people have hard and squalid lives. A small number of developed states have a controlling influence on world resources, markets and currencies, while another world—the third world, comprising most of the world’s populations—struggles against forces far too strong.

Pharaoh is everywhere. He sits enthroned in board rooms, legislatures, factory floors, churches and pulpits. Just as Pharaoh of old claimed divinity for himself, so his modern counterparts don religious vestments. Bishops, Mullahs and television evangelists manipulate the scruples of millions. Like the religious teachers in Christ’s day, they weigh down the consciences of their flocks with burdens that are too hard for them to bear, while they themselves lift not a finger to help them.

God Shows Up.
The king of Egypt and his xenophobic public are perpetrators of a terrible evil. But it is only wrong if the Creator-God of Genesis exists, and if He really does involve himself in the affairs of the world he made. If what Genesis teaches about origins is true; if God really did speak to Abraham and his descendants; if He did plant Jacob and his tribe in Egypt, then and only then is Pharaoh’s behavior wrong. Only then, are oppressor and oppressed answerable for their actions. Only then, will Pharaoh’s behavior not be permitted to stand.

Continued on next page
In Exodus 3, God shows Himself to Moses and begins a campaign to liberate his people.

Then Lord said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave-drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land...’ (Exodus 3:7, 8).

The tyrants of this world do not want change. They are happy with the world the way it is. They are desensitized by their privilege. They experience life from on high where the air is clean, the outlook pleasant; where they can’t see or smell Lazarus lying at their gate. In any event, they believe that their advantages indicate God’s approval of them; that His view is the same as theirs. How wrong they are!

God Knows Human Experience as a Sufferer Knows.

Exodus shows that God does not see the world through privileged eyes. He does not lie in an elevated hammock, far from the struggles of the oppressed, looking at cosmic light shows and listening to the music of the spheres. Far from it! A different spectacle fills his horizon; another noise jars his ears. His outlook is spoiled by the sight of men and women laboring beneath burdens that are too heavy to be carried. He hears the groans of the weary, the sobbing of the heartbroken and the cries of the despairing. God’s perspective is not that of the grand and powerful; not that of presidents, CEO’s, billionaires, movie stars, celebrities, the dominant and high-ranking. God’s sees and knows as do the desolate and the dejected.

In their Egyptian bondage, the Hebrews are the prototypical biblical poor. The poor in Scripture are not just those who have no money. Their poverty involves weakness and degradation. They are almost non-people; they do not count as much as other folk. What they think about or hope for is of little interest to those in charge. Their advice or opinions are not sought. They are manifestly unsuccessful and can, without political cost, be ignored, betrayed and exploited.

The poor know that their lives are not in their own hands. They often accept the view that others have of them—that they deserve to be poor; that God has abandoned them—therefore, the poor in the Bible are without hope.

But in Exodus, we are introduced to the surprising idea that God’s viewpoint is not that of Pharaoh, but the viewpoint of those whom he is exploiting. God sees, hears, and feels their misery, and He comes down to act on their behalf. Those in this world who live favored, indulged lives; who are wealthy, respectable and influential, often believe that God has the same opinions as they do. They assume they have God’s endorsement, and boldly claim to even in public. Yet Scripture indicates otherwise. God’s voice is not the one making persuasive arguments to say that wages should be kept as low as possible; it’s more likely Him that can be heard protesting that His wage is not enough to feed His family with. Not the warrior, bristling with weapons and afraid of no one—that’s not God. He is more likely to be the mother, huddling over the corpse of her child, caught in the crossfire. Not the television evangelist, resplendent in his designer suit promising that God will reward faith with material prosperity. He is more likely to be the discouraged soul in the audience who thinks he must not be one of the chosen, because he can’t get out of debt.

God is the boy with his limbs blown off; the girl with the disfigured face; the senior citizen in the nursing home whom no one comes to visit any more: frail, lonely, vulnerable; the odd person whom no one can be bothered with.

God: The Elephant Man

In 1883, a doctor in a London hospital, Frederick Treves, discovered a drastically disfigured man living in a room across the street. He learned that this person was known to some as the Elephant Man. He was incredibly and distressingly ugly. Treves later described him as the “most disgusting specimen of humanity I have ever seen.” His head, chest, skin, legs and shoulders were terribly...
deformed. The man’s name was David Merrick. For all of his life he had been shunned and derided. A showman, sensing an opportunity to make money out of him, hawked him from fair to fair, from theater to theater. People came to gawk at him for two pennies. For a long time, his only view of the world was from a peep-hole in the side of a cart, in which he was kept and transported.

God’s view is not represented by the entrepreneurial showman who made money out of the Elephant Man. God’s view is more likely to be the view from the peep-hole of the cart. That is what the Bible teaches. The Exodus story lays the foundation for one of the major themes of the Old Testament: that the politics of God are not those of the strong, but of the weak and vulnerable.

**Jesus: God’s Poor One**

Jesus identified himself with this perspective and expanded it. *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, he said, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18, 19).*

He saw himself as God’s response to the world’s oppressed. His invitation: “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28), stamps upon him the character and style of Yahweh of the Exodus.

In order to rescue the languishing poor of the earth, Jesus became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). Setting aside authority and power, he assumed the role of a common slave (Philippians 2:6, 7). He voluntarily chose a path in life that progressively stripped him of every common dignity. He was isolated from the community; he was denied justice, thrown in prison, beaten, mocked and robbed of the comforts of human friendship (Isaiah 53:7-9; Matthew 26 & 27).

He died a derelict. Pharaoh had flexed his muscle. Might had conquered right. The world belonged to the rich and powerful, not to the just and pure. The poor were expendable. They sky is shut against them. There is none to help.

But wait! On the third day there is a commotion. Jesus is not dead anymore. He appears alive to many. The kings and rulers of the earth have done their worst and God has overturned it. The Crucified has risen. God has glorified the archetypal Poor One. None are as poor as those who are dead. Jesus was dead, and is alive again. The poor have been given justice. God is on their side.

**God Slays the Dragon.**

Thousands of years ago, people thought that before the world was, there was nothing but a vast cosmic sea. Creation involved splitting the sea apart to make room for heaven and earth. Beyond the blue dome overhead there were ‘waters above the earth’ (Genesis 1:6, 7). In some ancient traditions, the vast sea was inhabited by a dragon or a sea monster, also known as Rahab (Isaiah 27:1; Job 26:12, 13). Creation was conceived as a divine victory over the dragon (Psalm 74:12-14). The dragon motif is present also in the Exodus. Pharaoh is identified with the sea monster (Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2; Isaiah 30:7; 51:9).

The God who comes to the aid of beleaguered Israel is the God of creation. He who metaphorically slew Rahab the dragon; splitting apart the sea to make the world, acts again with great power to slay Pharaoh the Egyptian monster; splitting apart the Red Sea in order to set His people free and establish them in a good place according to His eternal plan. The wretched of the earth belong to God. He sees their struggles and hears their cries. He does not forget them. He comes to their aid and it is His good pleasure to give them the kingdom.

*In some ancient traditions, the vast sea was inhabited by a dragon or a sea monster, also known as Rahab (Isaiah 27:1; Job 26:12, 13).*
I have been struck increasingly by the fact that the Bible seems to have been written for people in trouble who often felt helpless and powerless, suffering as they often were under oppressive rule at a time when religious people could be persecuted for their faith. It is a coincidence that the Bible was written, as it were, out of suffering to bring succor and comfort to those who are themselves victims? Can those who are strong and successful hear the Bible speaking as ‘deep speaking to deep?’ I am sure they can since the redeemed clearly include many from this group. Perhaps we should say that it is very difficult for grace to find and entrée with the powerful, and for them to hear the Scriptures in quite the same way as the hungry, the poor, the oppressed, and the scum of the earth.

What I certainly know is that it was exhilarating in my public ministry to preach the biblical message to our people in their distress through the oppression and injustice of apartheid. It was as if it had all been written with them in mind. How frequently I was able in South Africa, but also in other parts of our African continent (and sometimes in other continents), to speak about the God who had encountered Moses at the burning bush—the One who heard the cry of an oppressed rabble of slaves, who saw their suffering, who knew and would come down to deliver them. Those were words that resonated among our people at mass funerals after yet another massacre by the security forces of the apartheid state, or by hit squads, or by a sinister third force that fueled what was gleefully described as ‘black-on-black’ violence, as if white-on-black, or black-on-white violence might have been more tolerable.

In the depths of gloom and despair, these words about the God who acts brought solace and encouragement until the great vindication came when South Africa threw off the shackles of racist domination, when our people crossed their Red Sea and set out on a wilderness journey of transformation from repression to freedom to enter their promised land of a non-racist, non-sexist democracy.


1931—, South African religious leader. Educated in South Africa and London and ordained in 1961, he became (1975) the first black Anglican dean of Johannesburg. As general secretary of the South African Council of Churches (1978—84) he was an outspoken campaigner against apartheid and was awarded (1984) the Nobel Peace Prize for his nonviolent advocacy of reform. He was the first black elected (1986) archbishop of Cape Town (the Anglican primate of South Africa), serving until 1996. Tutu has remained active in South Africa’s political affairs and headed (1996—2003) the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was responsible for investigating human-rights abuses during the apartheid era.

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The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground” (Genesis 4:10).

Do not mistreat and alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt. Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry (Exodus 22:21-23).

Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits... Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, for you were aliens in Egypt (Exodus 23:6-9).

For the Lord your God is a God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God. Mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:17-19).

Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the Lord against you and you will be guilty of sin. Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of a widow as a pledge (Deuteronomy 24:14, 15, 17).

He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God (Proverbs 14:31).

Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their Defender is strong, he will take up their case against you (Proverbs 23:10, 11).

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope. “I the Lord have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those that sit in darkness (Isaiah 42:1-7).
God is the poor man’s friend. The poor man, in his helplessness and despair, leaves his case in the hands of God, and God undertakes to care for him. In the days of David—and I suppose the world has little improved—the poor man was the victim of everybody’s cruelty, and sometimes he was very shamefully oppressed. If he sought redress for his wrongs, he generally only increased them, for he was regarded as a rebel against the existing order of things. The very magistrates and rulers of the land became the instruments of his oppressors. Tens of thousands of eyes full of tears have been to Yahweh, and he has been invoked to interpose between the oppressor and the oppressed; for God is the ultimate resort of the helpless.

If the history of the world be rightly read it will be found that no case of oppression has been suffered to go long unpunished. The Syrian Empire was a very cruel one, but what is now left of Syria and Babylon? Go to the heaps of ruins by the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates and see what becomes of an empire which is only and instrument of oppression. In later times there sprang up the mighty empire of Rome. Why did it fall? Many reasons have been assigned, but you may rest assured that at the bottom of them all was the cruelty practiced towards the slaves and other poor people.

There is a fatal flaw in the foundation of any throne that does not execute justice. When ten thousand slaves have cried to God, apparently in vain, it has not really been in vain, for he has registered their cries.

For many years the transported slaves cried to God to deliver them, and at last deliverance came to the joy of emancipated multitudes, yet not without suffering to all the nations concerned in that great wrong. And here, too, if the employers of labor refuse to give to the agricultural laborer his just wage, God will surely visit them in his wrath. At this very day we have serfs in England, who, with sternest toil, cannot earn enough to keep body and soul together, and to maintain their families as they ought to be maintained. Where masters are thus refusing their laborers a fair remuneration for their work, let them know that whoever may excuse them, and whatever may be said of the laws of political economy, God does not judge the world by political economy. He judges the world by this rule: that men are bound to do that which is just and right to their fellow men; and it can never be right that a man should work like a slave, be housed worse than a horse, and have food scarcely fit for a dog. But if the poor commit their case to God he will undertake it. And I, as one of God’s ministers, will never cease to speak on behalf of the rights of the poor.

The whole question has two sides—the rights of masters and the rights of the men. Let not the men do as some workmen do: ask more than they ought; on the other hand, let not the masters domineer over their men, but remember that God is the master of us all, and he will see that right is done to all. Let us all act rightly toward one another, or we shall feel the weight of his hand and the force of his anger.

-Extracted from a sermon preached by Charles Haddon Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, June 8, 1873.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon is history’s most widely read preacher (apart from the biblical ones). Today, there is available more material written by Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, living or dead. One woman was converted through reading a single page of one of Spurgeon’s sermons wrapped around some butter she had bought.

Continued on next page
Spurgeon read The Pilgrim’s Progress at age 6 and went on to read it over 100 times. The New Park Street Pulpit and The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit - the collected sermons of Spurgeon during his ministry with that congregation - fill 63 volumes. The sermons’ 20-25 million words are equivalent to the 27 volumes of the ninth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. The series stands as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity.

Spurgeon’s mother had 17 children, nine of whom died in infancy.

When Charles Spurgeon was only 10 years old, a visiting missionary, Richard Knill, said that the young Spurgeon would one day preach the gospel to thousands and would preach in Rowland Hill’s chapel, the largest Dissenting church in London. His words were fulfilled. Spurgeon missed being admitted to college because a servant girl inadvertently showed him into a different room than that of the principal who was waiting to interview him. Later, he determined not to reapply for admission when he believed God spoke to him, “Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not!”

Spurgeon’s personal library contained 12,000 volumes - 1,000 printed before 1700. The library, 5,103 volumes at the time of its auction, is now housed at William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri. Before he was 20, Spurgeon had preached over 600 times.

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Years ago, an American psychologist warned: “Beware of those absurd feelings of hurrying and having no time—of breathlessness and tension, anxiety of feature, solicitude of results, that lack of inner harmony and ease.”

Today’s world puts strain on the nerves, emotions and the mind in general—not on the muscles. It is difficult to live a balanced life. The great Greek philosopher, Plato, said that all sickness is a result of the lack of proportion between the use of body and mind, and the great Americans that helped establish this wonderful country agreed. Thomas Jefferson warned the students of his day: “Unless the muscles are exercised at least one hour a day, you’ll not be truly efficient.”

For thousands of years, people became weary through heavy physical labor. But that is rare today. Tiredness from heavy physical exertion is easily healed from a good night’s sleep. But most modern weariness is not so easily remedied. If you are extremely weary day after day, the cause is almost certainly not physical, but emotional and mental. Dr. A.A. Brill, who was one of America’s most distinguished psychiatrists, had this to say: “One hundred percent of the fatigue of the sedentary worker in good health, is due to psychological factors, by which we mean emotional factors.”

Insurance companies have done a great deal of research on matters of health. Note some lines from one special leaflet on fatigue: “Hard work by itself seldom causes fatigue which cannot be cured by a good sleep or rest. Worry, tenseness, and emotional upsets are three of the biggest causes of fatigue. Often they are to blame when physical or mental work seems to be the cause. Remember, a tense muscle is working muscle. Ease up. Save energy for important duties.”

The Bible doesn’t address the subject of fatigue in a direct way, but its writers do make some astute observations. Consider Ecclesiastes 10:15:

\[
\text{The toil of the foolish wearies him, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.}
\]

The text means that the labor of a foolish person is wearying. When a person is confused and doesn’t know the right way to act, that person will suffer from unnecessary fatigue.

Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).
TO and FRO with the Editor

**Question:**
Can anyone who has never heard of Jesus be saved?
K.V.

**Answer:**
Men and women will be saved for eternity if they have turned willingly, dependently and lovingly to God—as best they know how. Israel of old did not know Jesus. Their understanding of God, though in advance of other religions, contained much that was primitive and sub-Christian. Yet they were God’s people. There are those in the world today, who do not know the name of Jesus, but whose heart is toward Him. They serve Him in their ignorance. Of the Roman centurion, Jesus remarked, “I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith” (Matthew 8:10). We do well to remember the vital truth about God’s grace, everywhere taught in both Old and New Testaments, that God is the initiator and nurturer of faith. Those who yet do not know the name of Jesus may nevertheless be subject to His Spirit (the Holy Spirit). That anyone should be saved at all has more to do with God than the specifics of their response to him.

**Question:**
Are those who teach that we are saved by grace, plus our obedience to God, Christian? Or to put it another way, are they themselves saved?
B.J.

**Answer:**
It is true that the Bible teaches that salvation is God’s great deed. It is not a joint-venture with God and Man as co-directors. The best argument against such a teaching is the letter to the Galatians—in its entirety. But even though the letter states that the ‘Judaizers’ have “fallen away from grace,” and chosen “another gospel,” and even though Paul goes as far as wishing that they would go the whole way and “castrate themselves,” we ought to be wary of seeking to label all such persons as non-Christian.

I think we can say that those who teach a “faith plus works” brand of Christianity are not teaching the Gospel as it ought to be taught. Possibly, they are honestly deluded in thinking that their services to God add something to His great sacrifice for us. They are wrong. They are destined for discouragement. We need to patiently share with them, but not pass judgment on them, to the point of excluding them from the kingdom of heaven. After all, if right thinking saves us, then we are all doomed. It is God that saves, not our ideas about God.

REST FOR THE WEARY IN 2007 (Continued)

In contrast, when Jesus was wearied from His journey (John 4), and sat by the side of a well, His fatigue was not emotional but physical. Jesus had walked twenty miles that morning. The reason why John makes that reference is to assure us that Jesus had a physical nature like ours. He was a real man! Even Adam would have been wearied by toil in the Garden of Eden.

Consider the most important reference in the Bible on weariness:

> Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

Our Lord sees so clearly that our weariness is chiefly weariness of soul. He says we can find rest for our souls. Our minds can be filled with peace, and the result will be that our body will be filled with the energy, vitality and effervescence that grows out of joy.

The main cause of weariness in the twenty-first century is soul-weariness; anxiety about our failures, our sins, our loved ones, our troubles. When we realize that Jesus took our place and died for us; that by accepting the gift of salvation by simple faith, we stand before God as sinless as Christ himself, then it is our privilege to experience great peace of mind. When we remember that we can never be lost as long as we look to Jesus our Lord, then we shall find peace and joy and abounding energy. If Christ can be trusted with our greatest problems—guilt and impending death—he can be trusted with all the rest. If one feels guilty, fatigue will often be one of the results. There is a vital connection between sin and health. Though trouble is a result of one’s own sin, it remains true that many of our physical problems are the result of our own follies.

We are too often self-centered. This leads us into an endless round of seeking assurance that we are of value. But that assurance can only be found in accepting God’s acceptance of us. Don’t worry too much about your attitude to God. It’s His attitude to us that counts. Our love to God is like the moon, it is only a reflection of his love—the sun. It is never a perfect reflection, but full of holes, and only rarely full. It is often just a waning streak. Concentrate instead on God’s love to you. It is like the outpouring of the sun, always at the full, always unchanging. The only barriers are the mists of unbelief that we put up. Colossians 2:6-7 tells us that as we received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we should walk in Him. We received Him by faith alone; not by feeling, not by achievement, not by doing anything. That is the way we are to live in Him.

-TO BE CONTINUED.
Introduction
St. George was originally an officer in the Roman Cavalry. He was known for his courage in war. He converted to Christianity. To demonstrate that Christians need not be meek, he set out to fight a dragon that was destroying the region of Cappodocia. The folk were terrorized by this dragon. To appease its wrath, they were forced to give up the best of their produce. This worked for a while, but the dragon became harder to please. At length they offered the dragon their very own virgin princess.

Enter St. George. He charged in on his tall white steed, driving his lance deep into the heart of the dragon. So, the people of Cappodocia were saved from a life of tyranny and servitude.

Many cultures have similar dragon tales. The Midgard Serpent of Scandinavian folklore is an example. Closer to our own time is the evil Lex Luther in his recurring battles with Superman.

The Bible came into being in a world-setting where such dragon legends were well established. Old Testament saints used elements of dragon mythologies to argue that their God was the one true God. In Babylonian, Canaanite, and Egyptian belief systems, there was a time before the world came to be when there was nothing but a vast cosmic sea. Creation involved splitting the sea apart to make room for heaven and earth between. The sea was chaos, and chaos was represented by a dragon, or a sea-monster which inhabited the sea. Creation was a victory over chaos; over the monster of the sea.

In Isaiah 27:2, the dragon is called Leviathin, the gliding, coiling serpent, the monster of the sea. In Job 26:12, the same creature is called Rahab. Elsewhere, Rahab is a poetic name for Egypt, and in Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2, Pharaoh himself is characterized as a great monster, lying in the streams. In the Exodus, God challenges Pharaoh’s oppression of Israel, and, as in creation, He is victorious over the dragon and He leads His people to freedom and dignity.

Read: Exodus 1:6-22.

- Do you note any similarity between Pharaoh in Exodus 1:8, and the serpent of Genesis 3:1?


Read: Exodus 3:1-10.

- Compare verses 7 & 8 with Genesis 50:24.

Note: When Jesus died on the cross, He represented all the misused and exploited people of the earth. It was as if Pharaoh had triumphed; the rich and powerful crushed the poor and the weak. No one listened to His cries. He epitomized the hopelessness of the oppressed. The weak one is made strong; the poor is now made rich. God is on their side, and He has answered their cries.

To demonstrate that Christians need not be meek, he set out to fight a dragon that was destroying the region of Cappodocia.
According to Article II of the United Nations Genocide Convention of 1948, the term *genocide* means "a major action committed with an intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." Certainly Pharaoh's policy of exterminating newborn Hebrew babies was genocidal under such a definition. Oppression of groups of human beings by other groups has continued to occur in the world from Bible times. Here are some more recent examples:

1. The deaths of unknown millions of Congolese, starting in 1885 and continuing into the twentieth century when the Congo Free State was controlled by King Leopold of Belgium. It was a regime of widespread forced labor, mutilation and torture.

2. The massacre of Armenian Christians by the Turks (1915, 1916).

3. The artificial famine of the 1930’s perpetrated by the communist government of the USSR.

4. The highly efficient extermination of up to 11 million people, including 6 million Jews, by the Nazis in WWII.

5. The avoidable “Great Bengal Famine” of 1943 which was under British control at the time. This needless holocaust killed almost 4 million human beings.

6. The destruction of over one million of the Cambodian intelligentsia by the Kmer Rouge in the 1970's.

7. The slaughter of Roman Catholics in East Timor by the government of Indonesia from 1975-1999. About one in three Catholics were killed.

8. The 1994 killing of 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda.

-Taken from internet sources.
Did You Know?

The Father’s Name, Yahweh, also known as the Tetragrammaton, is composed of four letters; YHWH, or sometimes YHVH. When Christ was crucified, the “charges” against Him were written in three languages and hung above His head in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. The charges in Hebrew would have read “Yeshua Ha’notri Y’melech Ha’yahudim”, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” The beginning letter of each phrase spells out the Tetragrammaton! The Father identified Himself with His Son as He was crucified.

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The Demon Rahab

In Jewish Folklore, Rahab is the name of a sea-demon, a dragon of the waters, the “ruler of the sea.” Rahab is, or was, the angel of insolence and pride, responsible for ‘shaking the waters’ and producing big waves. He is also responsible for the roaring of the sea. According to some sources, he was the guardian angel of Egypt, a position often designated to other angels such as Belial, Mastema, Samael and Uzza.

This name (Rahab), originally designated the primordial abyss, the water-dragon of darkness and chaos, and so comparable to Leviathan and Tiamat. Rahab later became a particular demon inhabitant of the sea; especially associated with the Red Sea.

The name was also applied to Egypt, and to the destruction of Pharaoh, after the exodus of the Israelites from that country was compared with the slaying of Rahab. For example, see Isaiah 59:9-11, where Rahab is connected to the sea serpent (dragon in the KJV). In this passage, the destruction of the Egyptians through the drying (parting) of the waters is compared to the myth of the destruction of Tiamat and the creation of the world. In this case, it is the creation of Israel as a nation that is described rather than the creation of the world, yet the comparisons are striking. Both creations involve water and a holy wind over the waters, and both involve a battle between order (YHVH) and chaos (the Egyptians, the watery abyss and Tiamat).

-From WIKIPEDIA, the free encyclopedia.