

Bimonthly Encouragement to Sudanese Christian Workers

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Deserving Respect from Outsiders.

Right in the middle of the story describing the plagues God inflicted on the Egyptians, is a tiny phrase that I must have skipped over dozens of times in my private Bible reading. It is especially relevant to Sudan's Christians today.

The circumstances were that God's people found themselves oppressed by the rulers of the land. They were treated unfairly, sometimes harshly. They had been slaves. Those who were free were treated little better than slaves, just because *they were* Israelites. They didn't have *to do* anything to be under suspicion. They were carefully watched *simply because of* their race.

God had seen their plight all along. Nothing ever escapes His view. (Exodus 2:23-25; 3:7-10; 11:1-2). He knew the future plans He had for them.

God had rescued Moses, when the Pharaoh tried to kill him along with all the other baby Israelite boys, at birth, (Exodus 2:1-10; Acts 7:20-22).

In Exodus 11 Moses is confronting Pharaoh and is warning of the final plague from God – the slaughter of every Egyptian firstborn, both human and animal.

Reading in Acts 7:22 we learn Moses was “educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” and “was powerful in speech and action”. I had remembered this bit of the story because of the excuse Moses made to God for his stubborn disobedience, Exodus 4:10.

But the small phrase I had missed for so long is this, found in Exodus 11:3, **“Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh's officials and by the people”**.

Moses lifestyle so far had earned him the respect of even his Egyptian “enemies”. They had watched what Moses did. They had listened to what Moses said. To many Egyptians what they saw was all good and what they heard made a lot of sense. The ruling Pharaoh was not convinced, but many of the common Egyptian people held a great respect for Moses – they recognised him as a good, sincere, man of God.

Now the country of Sudan and all Sudanese people are facing up to a momentous three months. A referendum is due in January 2011, the result of

which *could* (**it doesn't have to**) bring division and war. It is generally expected that many Southerners will vote one way while many Northerners will vote the other. And, even in democracy, both groups of people cannot win!

Yes, God has seen the suffering of Sudanese people on all sides. Yes, there has been unfair treatment, harsh exploitation, murderous violence, and deliberate deception. God knows the culprits as well as He knows the victims.

I do not doubt that God has raised up some Sudanese Christian leaders, men and women whom He has protected and educated, so that they are ready and willing to exercise godly leadership when called upon – locally and perhaps nationally too in Sudan.

But my question, one which arises out of this little phrase of Exodus 11:3, is this. **Have our Christian lives been lived in front of, and amongst, the Islamic majority? Have we Christians earned the respect of our Islamic brothers and sisters (that is, our fellow human beings in Sudan)?** Have we been good at this?

Verse 3 begins, **“the Lord made the Egyptians favourably disposed toward the people”**. God did it then and He can do it again whenever He wills it to be so. I pray that He will in these challenging times.

I also pray that we, God's people of Sudan, will be continually earning the respect and, even admiration, of the majority people. May our light shine out in the darkness, Matthew 5:14-16; 1 John 1:5-7.

Now, all you Christian preachers and teachers, don't get me wrong! I am **not** hoping that God will kill every firstborn in Sudanese Islamic families – *that is taking this parallel much too far!* I will rather pray that God will help all Islamic families to meet Jesus as their Saviour, before they meet Him as their Judge.

Their pathway to seeing Jesus as Saviour may well be brought into their focus by Christians such as you and me living as Jesus would live amongst them, see Acts 10:38-39.

The first Christians also **“enjoyed the favour of all the people”**, Acts 2:47; and **“were highly regarded by the people”**, Acts 5:13. They were encouraged to **“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us”**, 1 Peter 2:12.

Like Moses and the people of his day, and like Jesus and His first disciples, may we live God-honouring lives which will further God's own purposes in today's Sudan, influencing tomorrow's Sudan as well.

Pastor Colin Salter. (Please share these thoughts with others and refer them to my website for more study resources!).