

1619 – 2019 What Does It Mean?

This year of 2019 is recognized as the four-hundredth year of the first documentation of Africans brought to North America as slaves, which, interestingly, parallels a biblical prophecy and parable found in Genesis 15 (NKJV) that speaks to the plight of African-Americans in the United States.¹ It is the premise of this writing that African-Americans, when informed by both their history and by the knowledge of God's covenant, will find within themselves the power to rise above any attempt to oppress, incarcerate, or mis-educate, and the power to move beyond survival into a thriving people and community.

In the Genesis 15 narrative, God has blessed Abram (Abraham) with an estate of wealth but no children to inherit his wealth.² God assures Abram that this will not be the case, that he will father children and have descendants who will be as numerous as the number of stars in the sky. Abram believed God, and God accounted it for righteousness (vs. 4-6). Then Abram asks God how he will know of his descendants and inheritance (v. 7). But before God responds, God requires of Abram a meat sacrifice, perhaps to support the spiritual preparedness of Abram, to receive and understand God's prophecy (v. 9).

The prophecy begins in Genesis 15:13-14, as God reveals to Abram that his descendants will be strangers in a land that is not their own, and that they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years, after which God will judge that oppressor nation and Abram's descendants will be brought out of that nation with great possessions. As descendants of Abraham, Israel's history reflects this narrative, when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt after 400 years of slavery and oppression, into the land of promise. The experience of their journey is found in the biblical books of Exodus through Joshua.

God's prophecy to Abram continues in Genesis 15:15-16 with God telling Abram that he will live to a good old age. God then tells Abram that in the fourth generation, which translates to four thousand years, Abram's descendants "*shall return here*" (before God), because the iniquity (sin and injustice) of the *Amorites* is not yet completed, thus, indicating that when this people is fed up with their sinful unjust oppression, they too will go before God who will rescue them from such oppression and bring them out "as it was for Israel in the day he came up from the land of Egypt" (Isaiah 11:16). The enslavement and deliverance of Abram's descendants *repeats*.

To apply this prophecy and parable to the plight of African-Americans, a few factors must be considered. First, the timing. Biblical historians and Israel's history place this relationship and dialogue between God and Abram on a timeline approximately 2,000 years Before Christ (BC or BCE – *Before the Christian Era*). The earth is now in a period 2,000 years after Christ or AD (After Death). This accounts for the four generations or four thousand years in Genesis 15:16. The four hundred years of slavery and oppression are 1619-2019 for African and African-American slaves, and African-Americans who are descendants of African slaves, who yet endure the hardships of oppression and racism, which are extensions of slavery.

¹ "African-American" is hyphenated to recognize and respect the "Middle Passage," which is the Atlantic Ocean, where reportedly millions of captured Africans died in transport to the Caribbean and the Americas.

² Abram undergoes a name change in Genesis 17, where God adds "ha" making "ham" the suffix to the name, thus, Abraham.

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The second factor is that African slaves and their African-American descendants are also descendants of Abraham through his first son Ishmael, who Abraham fathered by his Egyptian maid Hagar. Despite the Apostle Paul's reasoning that Ishmael was a child of the flesh (Romans 9:7-9) and Isaac the child of promise, Ishmael was still Abraham's son, of whom God said He would bless exceedingly and make a great nation, because he too was Abraham's son (Genesis 21:13). For further insight on this prophetic narrative, reference Genesis chapters 15-21.

Amorites are descendants of Ham, Noah's son (Genesis 10). Hagar, from the land of Ham (Egypt, Africa), qualifies as an Amorite as does her son Ishmael, who is Abraham's first son. Thus, the prophecy God gives Abraham in Genesis 15 speaks to the history of Israel, descendants of Abraham through his second son Isaac and grandson Jacob (Israel), and also speaks prophetically to the descendants of Abraham through his first son Ishmael of African ancestry by way of his mother Hagar of Egypt.³ Genesis 15:13-16 also speaks to the prophetic statement of "the first shall be last and the last shall be first," indicative of Ishmael's descendants receiving the inheritance last and the descendants of Isaac to first receive the inheritance.⁴ Sarah, the mother of Isaac, Abraham's second son, spoke to this part of the prophecy in Genesis 21:10, stating that "the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir *with* my son Isaac". Sarah did not have the authority to deny Ishmael and his descendants the right to receive an inheritance from Abraham, however, just not at the same time as her son Isaac, in accordance with God's prophecy.

Genesis 17 tells of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. As a sign of the covenant, God institutes circumcision for Abraham, which includes Abraham's sons and all the men who come into Abraham's estate. This includes Ishmael, who was age 13 at the time (Genesis 17:25), and Isaac, who was circumcised at 8 days old when he was born (Genesis 21:4). As the narrative unfolds, African-Americans, descendants of African slaves, are descendants of Abraham by way of the covenanted Ishmael, who is of Egyptian, African descent. Therefore, African-Americans are a covenanted people, with God and by God, through Abraham and Ishmael.

This biblical prophecy and parable in Genesis 15, parallels and corresponds with the history and narrative of African-Americans, descendants of African slaves – living in a land that is not theirs, still enslaved through racism and oppression, a people undervalued, underestimated and marginalized four hundred years, 1619-2019.

Taking the historical journey from 1619 up to 2019 can be, and should be, a spiritually eye opening experience, or an awakening that is sure to keep the African-American and others "woke". Slave trade or the arrival of slaves to the eastern shores of North America, what is now the United States of America, begins with 1619 as the year of such documentation. Africans who were captured, by whatever means, were then involuntarily brought to North America, South America, and the Caribbean, sold into slavery, separating families, spouses, parents and children, all in the name of commerce and capital gain.

These slaves were forced into unpaid labor in several industries. Cotton was number one. This people was not a union of voluntary employees receiving fair wages. Often beaten into

³ Egypt is referenced biblically as "the land of Ham" in Psalm 78:51, 105:23, 27 and 106:22; 1 Chronicles 4:40.

⁴ "So the last will be first, and the first last." (Matthew 20:16); however, the wages or inheritance will be the same (Matthew 20:1-16, with particular attention to versus 14-16).

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submission, this was forced free labor. Slave labor is at the base of the economic foundation on which capitalism in the United States of America yet stands. This was the beginning of the 400 year journey, which transitions out of the enslaved 1600's into the socially, economically and politically polarized Southern and Northern territories of the 1700's, through the early and mid-1800's, up to the Civil War, Emancipation, Reconstruction and Jim Crow, into the 1900's with more racial divisions, segregation and oppression, during all of which the struggle continued for freedom, civil and equal rights for African-Americans, descendants of African slaves. But the struggle comes with a price. There were lives sacrificed, families that were destroyed, bodies that were mutilated, women and children who were abused and misused, and laws and unjust systems that permitted, supported and often encouraged this all to happen.

For a survey of the unrelenting conclusion of 400 years, fast forward to the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's, into this new millennium and up to the present day, to examine how slavery continues in the oppression and racism against the descendants of African slaves, who are consequently and ultimately descendants of Abraham.

Lest America wakes up and stays “woke” (particularly African-Americans), the slaying of Emmitt Till, the sacrifice of Rosa Parks, the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the execution of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, the systemic conviction of the Central Park 5, the “stand your ground” death of Trayvon Martin, the Ferguson awakening death of Michael Brown and the psychological slavery of Black on Black crime, in addition to the millions of other deaths and sacrifices that speak to the plight of African-Americans, all will be in vain!⁵ The racist oppressive supremacist bigotry behind this emasculation has escalated and risen to the top office of the United States of America, exploiting the country's racial divide. One example is the assault on Black and Brown people with America's leadership socially and verbally attacking four first term African-American Congresswomen, called the “Squad”. These women were attacked because they spoke against immigration policies, which target Black and Brown people, primarily those at the Mexican border of the United States seeking asylum. All four Congresswomen are of African descent. The four women are: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York; Rashida Tlaib of Michigan; Ilhan Omar of Minnesota; Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, all U.S. citizens.

This racist, xenophobic, misogynistic oppressive experience of African-Americans and their history parallels the history of Israel, descendants of Abraham. In the Book of Exodus, there is a new king over Egypt (Exodus 1:8). This new king had no regard for Joseph and Israel (Hebrews), and was fearful that they would become greater in number than the people of the king. This new king placed hardships on the Hebrews, set “taskmasters” over them to oppress them with forced labor (Exodus 1:11 NRSV). In 2016, the United States elected a new president who, seemingly, has no regard nor respect for African-Americans, descendants of African slaves, neither regard for Black and Brown people of any nationality, for fear of White America being out numbered, much like the king of Egypt. The systemic racism of the United States places

⁵ The term “Black” is used in reference to African-Americans, descendants of slaves, and is synonymous to “African-American”.

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additional hardships on people of color, up to and including genocide, as did the new king on the Hebrews, descendants of Abraham (Exodus 1:16).⁶

Today the United States has the Prison Industrial Complex, where the incarcerated can be used as free or cheap labor, for production and manufacturing, for the profit of private prison corporations, which is forced oppressed labor or modern day slavery. The sin of American capitalism continues. The 13th Amendment, which supposedly abolished slavery, makes an allowance that supports prison slave labor: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”⁷ The exception, *punishment for a crime and duly convicted*, allows the Prison Industrial Complex to use prisoners as slave labor. In addition, more African-American adults are under correctional control today – in prison or jail, on probation or parole – than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began.⁸ (In 2007 – 2.4 million Black adults were under correctional supervision; according to 1850 Census, approximately 1.7 million adults, ages 15 and older, were slaves.)⁹

What does this mean to African-Americans? First, this means African-Americans, as any other people, must know their history. This, too, is ordered and ordained by God, that we not forget our history and that we teach the same to our children and grandchildren that they should know their history and their God (Deut. 4:5-9; Psalm 78:1-8). We must realize that knowing one’s history and culture, inspires pride, self-esteem and value, which today are characteristics missing in the lives of many young African-Americans. Second, knowing cultural history informs of the *obligation* to live with respect to that history, from which comes the *responsibility* and *conviction* of building on the legacy of that history.

As descendants of Abraham, this means African-Americans are a covenanted people with God. It means that African-Americans can become, can have, and can do whatever they put their minds to become, have, or do. Whatever! Unaware of the covenant, many African-Americans may, perhaps, be living beneath their privilege and value. With the knowledge of African-American history, Black America can see the beginning of slavery, the emancipation, but also the ongoing attempt to oppress their community. This means the struggle continues!

Knowledge of this covenant relationship does not detract from the salvation and the personal relationship with God offered through Jesus Christ. In John 17:1-6, Christ, in his prayer to the Father, reports that his work is done, that he has fulfilled the assignment for which he was sent. His assignment was to give eternal life, which he did. Christ defines eternal life as “knowing” God (John 17:3). This means that our relationship with God is personal. A covenant relationship with God, coupled with a personal relationship with God, makes African-Americans a special type of chosen people, to be sanctified, set apart. The four hundred years are concluding. It is time for African-Americans to receive from God their rightful inheritance and

⁶ Genocide, including but not exclusively, the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group; racial, ethnic, or religious killing; defined by the United Nations (1948), Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

⁷ The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was passed by the Senate April 8, 1864, and by the House January 31, 1865, and ratified by the required number of states on December 6, 1865.

⁸ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, (New York: The New Press, 2012) 180.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 288, note 7.

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place of salvation. This means African-Americans must personally and collectively go before God, seeking God's guidance and deliverance.

1619-2019 – What does it mean? It means a new chapter in the narrative of African-Americans is beginning. It means a psychological liberation is taking place. It means a new day is dawning, where God's prophecy is revealed, where racism and oppression no longer dictate and control the narrative of African-Americans. Informed by the biblical narrative and covenant, along with African-American cultural history, African-Americans can be enlightened and empowered to rise above oppression, racism and the stigma of slavery. It means that a great people will rise to live up to their true God-given intellect, talent, and ability, and receive their true God-given inheritance. This includes living according to God's Word and leading according to God's will. This, as it was for Israel, is to direct others to their personal relationship with God and into the Kingdom of God. It means transformation. Life in America, as experienced over the last 400 years, will not continue to be the same. This is God's prophecy, over which humanity has no control, other than repentance for God's salvation. Will America repent for its original sin?¹⁰ Probably not. Will African-Americans rise to their rightful place of leadership in the world? Absolutely Yes!¹¹ Albeit through and with the power of God. After all, it is God's prophecy.

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¹⁰ Armed with the knowledge of the covenant relationship with God informs of an inheritance, that which will come from God, not something America is willing to relinquish. Forty acres and a mule have not and probably will not happen, not willingly. African-Americans must continue to pursue reparations for slavery, America's original sin.

¹¹ In the meantime, African-Americans, as all other citizens, must register to vote, become informed on candidates and issues, and VOTE! Exercising the right to vote impacts laws, impacts those who make and enforce laws, impacts citizenship, and can impact the decision to study reparations and subsequent decisions. Participate! VOTE!