

Illustrated Bible Life

A Scary Place to Be

When we think of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, we often picture them slaving away to build the pyramids. That's perhaps only natural, since the pyramids are the quintessential Egyptian monument, they are very old, and they would have required a massive labor force to erect them. However, the pyramids predate the coming of Jacob and his family to Egypt by around 500 years.

The Israelites were actually put to work on the cities of Pithom and Rameses. Genesis 47:6 tells us that when Joseph brought his family to live in Egypt, Pharaoh had them settle in the region of Goshen. Verse 11 tells us that Joseph "gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses."

The pyramids are visible from this region, which is north of modern-day Cairo. In the early years after they settled there, one might imagine some of these Israelites growing curious about these magnificent structures and making the trip to see them up close. However, after 400 years of living in their shadow, perhaps the monuments had faded into merely an interesting backdrop to their daily lives.

Ancient peoples did not travel much as we do today, especially for leisure. A long trip took time—transportation was slow and many dangers awaited one on the roads. Moreover, most ordinary people found it enough to do the day's work and no more. Unless you were wealthy, you didn't really have the time, money, or energy to travel. Even if the sight you wanted to see was as close as the pyramids would have been. Still, I wonder if some of the Israelites thought about it, and if they wished they could take the time off.

As it happens, the generation that left Egypt did think nostalgically about that far-off land out in the wilderness. They thought about the fact that there, they had homes to go to—but not about how dead-tired they were when they got home after laboring for their Egyptian overlords all day. They thought about the food they ate—"pots of meat and . . . all the food we wanted" (Exodus 16:3)—was this even a true statement?

Out in the wilderness, they found out what it meant to surrender their future to the God of the universe rather than human overlords who didn't have their best interests at heart. It was a scary place to be.

It's still a scary place to be. When we've done all we can to plan for our future, we are still, ultimately, forced to let circumstances take their course. Thanks be to God that we have One who does have our best interests at heart and to whom we can surrender our future.