

Egypt



This travel journal leads us on a journey to a location related to the Bible.

Formations Travel Journal by Jim Pitts

Luxor

Egypt is fabled for its monumental pyramids, royal tombs, temples, and treasure. Prompted by pharaonic aspirations of a journey beyond mortality to the eternal, massive rocks were moved, hieroglyphic texts were carved, and burial chambers were stocked. Such efforts were acts of devotion to their past, anticipation of a world to come, and an expression of artistic and architectural sophistication.



Where is Egypt? Geographically speaking Egypt lies at the northeastern corner of Africa, separated from the land of Canaan by the Sinai Wilderness. In ancient times, Egypt was confined to the Nile River valley: a long, narrow ribbon of “black” fertile land surrounded by

“red” uninhabitable desert. Egypt is home to one of the earliest civilizations. It had an important cultural and political influence on ancient Israel.

Beginning around 3200 BC, a series of dynasties ruled Egypt for three millennia. They were replaced by the Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines. The Arabs introduced Islam and the Arabic language in the seventh century and ruled for the next six centuries. Around 1250, control then shifted to the Mamluks, a Turkish regime that continued to govern after Egypt was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1517. Britain seized control of Egypt’s government in 1882. However, allegiance to the Ottoman Empire continued until 1914. Partial independence from the British began in 1922. Finally, Egypt acquired full sovereignty after World War II.

Cairo vista

Mosques and minarets mark places of worship. From these spires, the faithful are called to prayer.



Watered by the River Nile, Egypt is surrounded by barren deserts on both the east and the west. Much of its agricultural land is being lost to urbanization and windblown sands. A rapidly growing population of 79 million makes Egypt the largest country in the Arab world. A majority of the population, nearly 90 percent, is Sunni Muslim. Coptic Christians make up about 9 percent of the population, with 1 percent being other Christians.

In the history of salvation, Egypt is a significant place and a spiritual metaphor. Within the Hebrew Bible, the Exodus is the formative moment signaling a time when nobodies became somebodies. Slaves were fashioned by God into a free people. Their deliverance is central to the Jewish story.

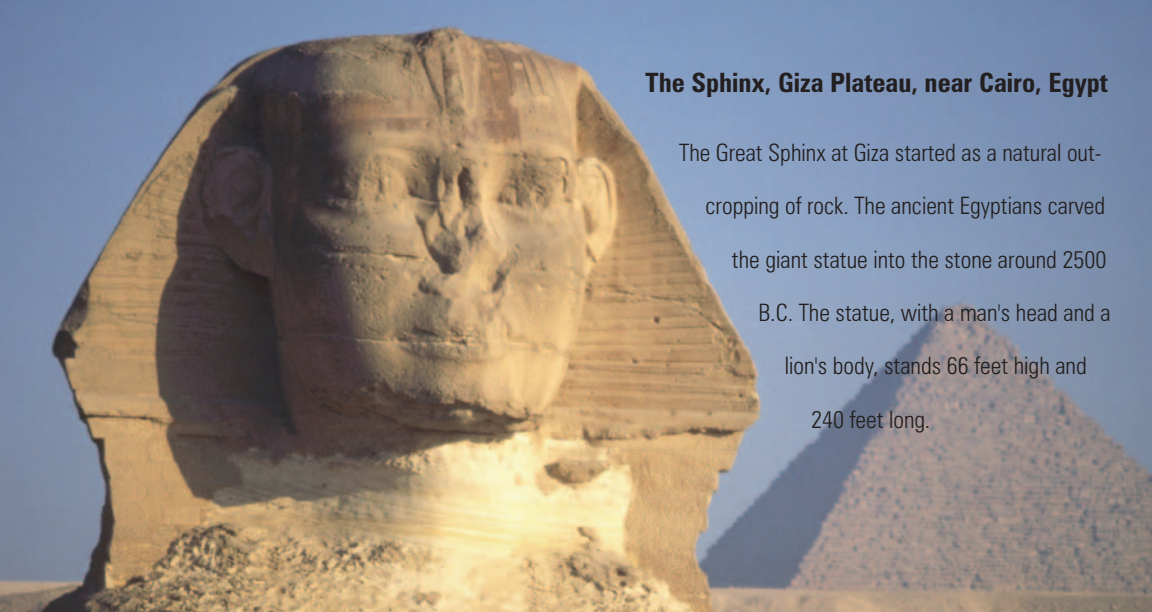
The Exodus is the great freedom story before Christ. Israel had been called to be God's people in the world. The people of Abraham had fallen on hard times and became slaves in Egypt. In their bondage, they had become makers of bricks and builders of larger-than-life memorials for their powerful masters. Their conscripted labor was combined

with that of others who were movers of massive rocks, artisans in stone, and erectors of columns and statues.

God's message through Moses was, "Let my people go!" Following a series of signs and wonders, the people of God came out of Egypt. They were headed to the promise of new life and a new land. Leaving Egypt, they moved through marshy waters out into a dry desert place. They entered a wilderness process of wandering and

Wall carvings tell the story of an ancient society where leaders were revered by their subjects and served by slaves.





The Sphinx, Giza Plateau, near Cairo, Egypt

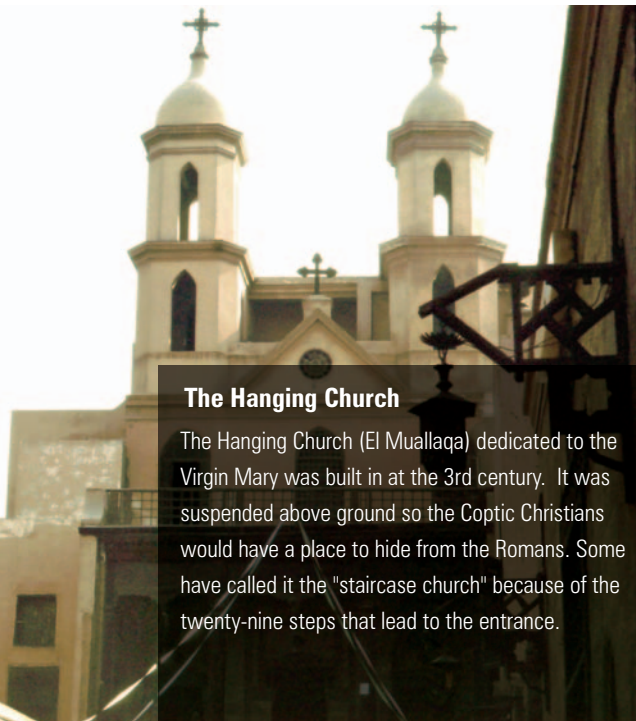
The Great Sphinx at Giza started as a natural outcropping of rock. The ancient Egyptians carved the giant statue into the stone around 2500 B.C. The statue, with a man's head and a lion's body, stands 66 feet high and 240 feet long.

wondering. Eventually, in God's good time, Moses led them to the border of the promised land.

For the early church, which saw itself as a new (or renewed) Israel, the Holy Family's flight into Egypt and return parallel that of Moses. Jesus came to be seen as another Moses who leads the people out of captivity into freedom. This new

Moses reaches out to the marginalized, abused and demeaned, forming them into a new people.

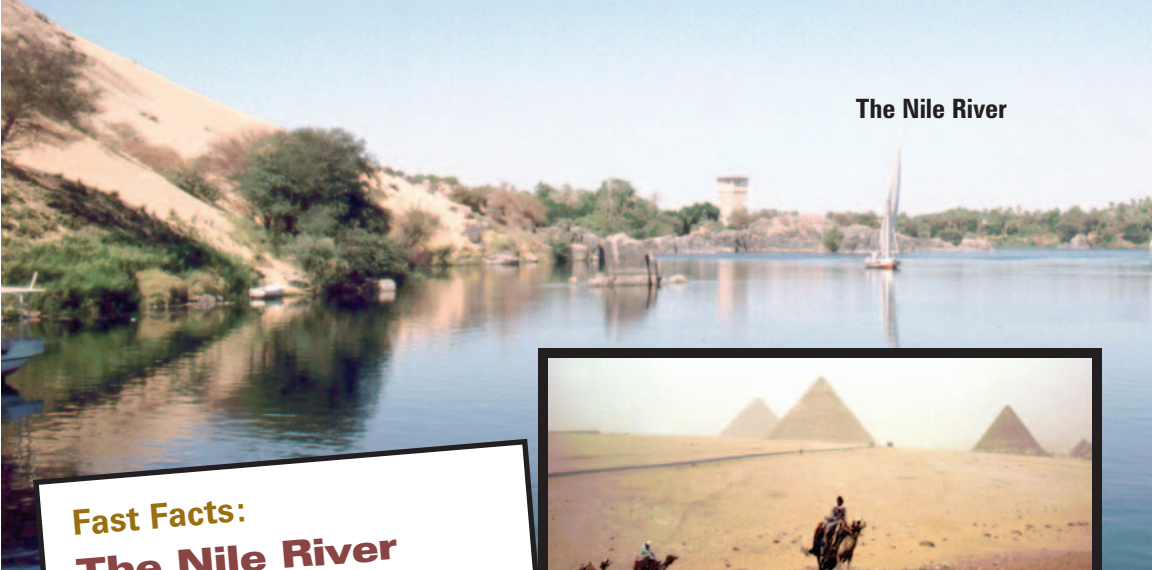
In Coptic tradition, nearly a dozen sites are associated with the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. The Copts believe this sojourn lasted about three years. In the old city of Cairo near the Roman fortress of Babylon is the Church of Saint Sergius. Beneath the altar there is a crypt or grotto, which, according to legend, was the resting place of Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child on their arrival in Egypt. A church has been located on that site since the second or third century AD. Because the ground water in old Cairo is rising, the crypt is now flooded. The muddy pool under the altar is reminiscent of a back-woods baptismal pond.



The Hanging Church

The Hanging Church (El Muallaqa) dedicated to the Virgin Mary was built in at the 3rd century. It was suspended above ground so the Coptic Christians would have a place to hide from the Romans. Some have called it the "staircase church" because of the twenty-nine steps that lead to the entrance.

In the Bible, Egypt is synonymous with desert anxiety, mountain peaks of exhilaration, valleys of shadowy despair, and a wilderness way to a land of promise, new life, and freedom.



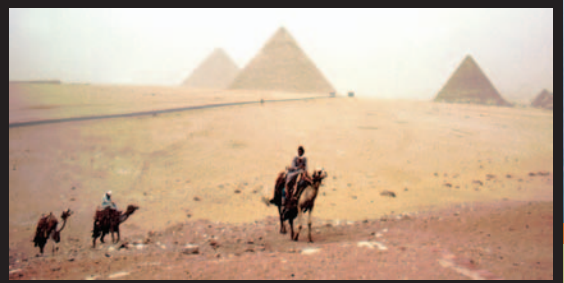
Fast Facts:
The Nile River

Name: The Nile gets its name from the Greek word “Nelios,” meaning “river valley.”

Sources: The White Nile: Lake Victoria, Uganda. The Blue Nile: Lake Tana, Ethiopia.

Length: 6695 kilometers (4184 miles). The Nile is the longest river in the world, stretching north from East Africa to the Mediterranean.

Countries: The Nile and its tributaries flow through nine countries. The White Nile flows through Uganda, Sudan, and Egypt. The Blue Nile starts in Ethiopia. Zaire, Kenya, Tanzanian, Rwanda, and Burundi all have tributaries that flow into the Nile or into Lake Victoria.



Giza Plateau



Holy Family Tile Painting



Wall Painting of Virgin and child

Coptic wall painting of the Holy Virgin and Child with apostles.