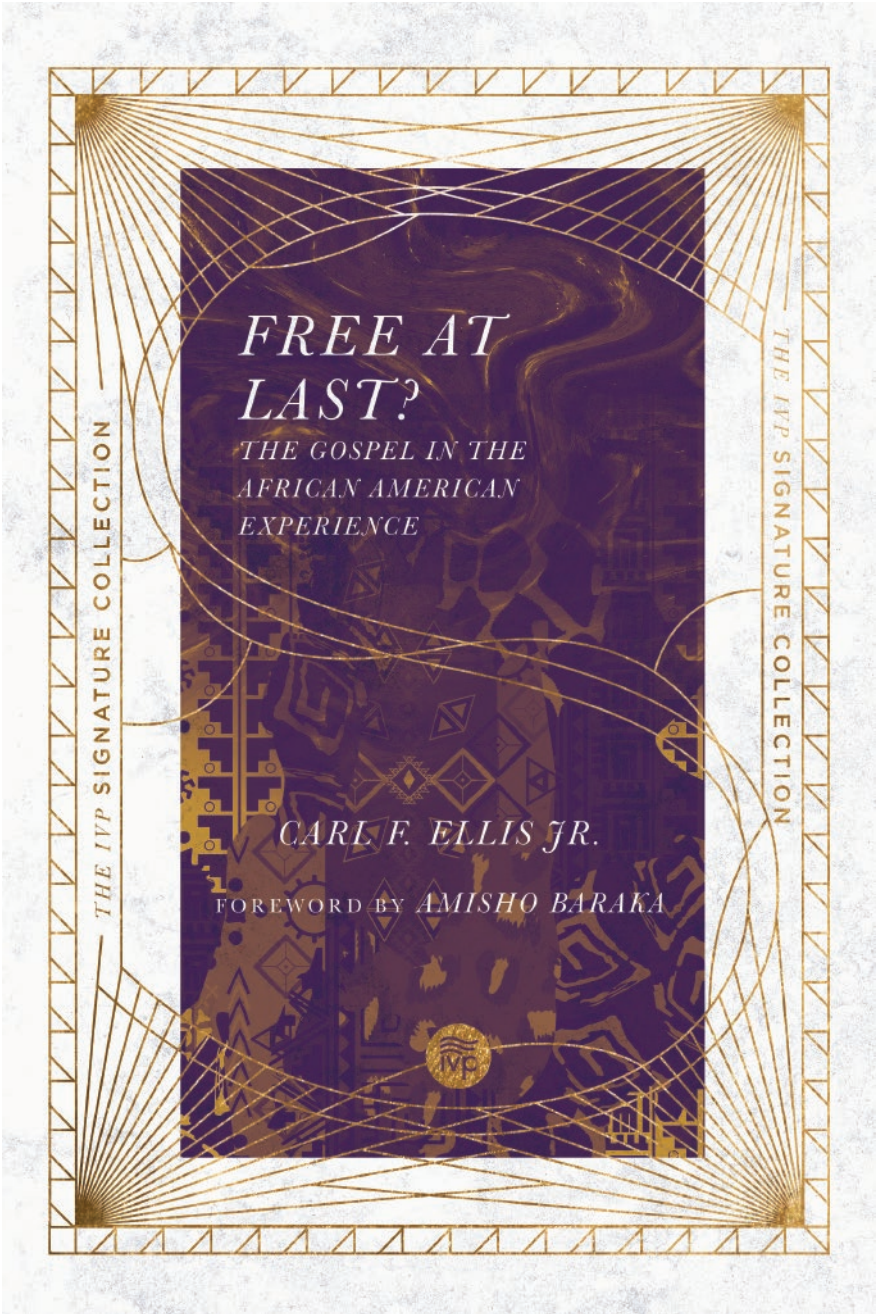


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Toward a Promised Land

For four hundred years they had been oppressed. Their sense of history and destiny was all but wiped out. Their consciousness was blurred and distorted, their culture polluted with false values. Their knowledge of the one true God had become tangled up with a proliferation of man-made gods. Their sense of dignity had been overwhelmed by feelings of inferiority, feelings that came from the dehumanization inflicted by a racist society. The people felt forsaken by God.

Yet God remained faithful. He did not forsake them. In fact, he was already implementing his eternal plan of liberation. In ten demonstrations of judgment, God broke the back of a king who had used his technology to maintain a brutal system of slavery. God thus brought his people out of Egypt so that they might become his light to the nations.

This goal, however, could not be reached overnight. The people had to be prepared through gradual de-Egyptianization as they journeyed

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in the wilderness. God began to restore their culture, raising it to new heights through Moses and the law.

Parallels in History

A survey of African-American history reveals that like the children of Israel, we have had a four-hundred-year collective trauma from which we have yet to fully recover. And like the children of Israel we have sojourned in a philosophical wilderness as our thinking has developed. The big question we face is, Has God been guiding us toward a promised land?

Martin Luther King Jr., in his *Memphis speech** the night before he died, prophetically answered that question:

> We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountain top. I won't mind.
>
> Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will.
>
> And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and *I've seen the promised land*.
>
> I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land.
>
> So I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.[1]

But questions still remain. What is this "promised land" like? Who is going to lead us there? How can we get there from here?

During the 1960s African-Americans had a real sense of direction. But by the time the eighties arrived our sense of direction had all but evaporated. More recently we've seen the emergence of a new militancy. Yet it seems we are still confused, like the children of Israel after they refused to possess the land God had given them (Numbers 13—14).

God had sent ten plagues to break the back of Pharaoh and discredit his pagan gods. He had dealt the mighty Egyptian army, with its

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superior technology, a major military setback at the Red Sea. He had fed the people from the sky. He had provided fresh water from a pool of poison. The Israelites reached the Promised Land one year after leaving Egypt. Yet they failed to believe that the same God who had done all this could defeat some fifth-rate Canaanite tribes.

What was so bizarre was that having decided not to take God and his word seriously, they wanted to return to Egypt—to slavery and oppression! They wanted to readopt the false values that had obliterated their culture and sense of worth.

Where Have All the Leaders Gone?

Today the African-American community is in a similar situation. We are aware of the moral and legal victories of the sixties. But racism is still with us. In fact, it has even become "politically correct." Now we are in a state of theological and cultural disarray. We have a crisis of leadership, of identity. We are in a morass of me-ism. Where did this crisis begin?

Much of the generation of leadership that carried us through the sixties has died naturally, been assassinated or gone off into relative obscurity. Dr. King is gone. So is Malcolm X. *Huey P. Newton** was blown away. Others have been co-opted by the establishment. Still others have lost touch with our people. We will not come into our own until a new generation inherits the mantle of leadership. But where will this new leadership come from? How will it build on the previous contributions?

Where This Book's Discussion Will Take Us

These are among the questions we will examine in this book. In part I we will look briefly at a variety of concepts and issues that will be discussed more fully in the rest of the book. I want to lay some groundwork for a fresh analysis of some of the great issues in the African-American experience. Part II will touch on the major phases of African-American cultural history and point out some lessons we have learned.

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In part III we will look at the root of *culture** as the human response to God's revelation. We will also look at the crippling effects of humanity's negative response to God, on consciousness in general and on the African-American consciousness in particular. In addition, I will discuss the nature of theology, along with some new ways it can empower our people to reach our cultural potential. Finally, part IV ties together what we have learned, suggesting how we can apply this knowledge toward developing a new agenda.

Though written from an African-American perspective, this work is not intended only for an African-American audience. Using the African-American cultural experience as the point of contact, I have attempted to forge a fresh understanding of how God by his *grace** is active in culture.

At the back of this revised edition is a glossary of people, events and terms. This is an alphabetical listing of (1) terms that either are used in a specialized sense or cannot be found in a standard dictionary, (2) historical information on events and organizations alluded to and (3) significant leaders (listed by last name), with biographical information. Names, events and terms included in the glossary are italicized and marked with an asterisk (*) the first time they appear in the text.

May you be encouraged to know God in new and deeper ways as you gain a fresh understanding of African-American *history** and culture. Whatever your background may be, I pray that this study will give you new insights to analyze the culture in which you live. Finally, it is my prayer that the principles contained in this book will play a role in building bridges of understanding and facilitating reconciliation where there has been alienation.

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