

EXODUS

A Story
for
Today



RALPH E. JOHNSON

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EXODUS

Ralph E. Johnson

Dedicated to God in gratitude for his grace
that not only delivers us from Egypt
but sustains us so that we need
never return again.

All Scripture is taken from the New
International Version of the Bible
unless otherwise specified.

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Prologue

The Exodus of Israel from captivity in Egypt is the great redemptive event under the old covenant. It foreshadows Calvary and being delivered from the penalty and power of sin under the new covenant. Egypt is a type of the world, Pharaoh a type of Satan and the story a picture of spiritual struggles in the lives of all who turn in faith to Jesus Christ.

We must do more than escape from Egypt. There are hangups, hurts and habits that need to be cleansed from our life. The same options available to Israel exist, including going back to the bondage that Egypt represents. For Satan always tries his best to recapture those who escape his grip, just as the Pharaoh sent chariots after the fleeing Hebrews.

Paul says what happened is written down as a warning so that we don't fall when we think we're standing firm. This is so contrary to teaching that it's impossible to shipwreck our relationship with Jesus. But falling from faith isn't just warned about in the scriptures. It's often seen in the reality of life.

This book is written in particular for those in the body of Christ experiencing difficulty with life-controlling issues such as abuse of alcohol, tobacco, drugs or food, or excessive love of material things, sexual immorality, pornography, and dependence on other people known as co-dependency.

Only to the degree we know Jesus in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead can we enjoy his fellowship, be used in service, and glorify his name. The Godhead which Jesus perfectly represents is all-powerful(omnipotent), all-knowing(omniscient) and present everywhere(omnipresent). And it will never change, so it profits us to understand the character of God as revealed in his names.

In the Exodus, God's character is revealed in terms of relationship toward people. He's revealed as all-powerful creator **Elohim** which is translated *God*; as covenant-keeping **Jehovah** translated *LORD*; as all-sufficient **El Shaddai** translated *God Almighty* and as sovereign **Adonai** who demands submission to his lordship and is translated *Lord* or *Master*.

In reality, God has only one name which he gives himself: **I AM**, without beginning or end. This name speaks of the relationship God wants with us. God was saying to Moses, "**I AM** all that you need and always will be." That's our inheritance in Jesus, and if we appropriate it to our lives, we'll live in all that the promised land represents.

The promised land pictures a victorious life meant for everyone saved by grace through faith in Jesus. My prayer is that those not living in victory will find hope and encouragement in this book. The author himself is one whom God set free from life-controlling addictions, making it possible to live in the promised land by grace through faith.

Part I

EGYPT

*The Israelites groaned in their slavery and
cried out, and their cry for help because of their
slavery went up to God. God heard their
groaning
and he remembered his covenant with Abraham,
with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the
Israelites and was concerned about them.*

Exodus 2:23-25

Part I. *EGYPT*

1. Background

In 2100 B.C., Abraham was told by God to leave his country for a new land. Known as Abram, he was to leave a land of idol worship and do what God commands of us today: “Come out...and be separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17). Abram was to live as an alien and stranger on earth so that he might receive the promises of God. It was a principle of ‘*if...then*’ established by God shortly after creation and one repeated through Scripture. *If* one obeys the ways of God, *then* one can have the fullest confidence of receiving the blessings of God.

By obeying the commands of God (Genesis 12:1;15:1;17:1), Abram would not only inherit a new land. A great nation would develop in time through his descendants and every nation on earth would be blessed, referring to the coming of the Messiah. So together with his wife Sarai and nephew Lot, he left with his possessions and servants for the land of Canaan, later to be known as Israel. On arrival, Abram was promised by God that this land would be the inheritance of his descendants forever.

As the years passed, however, Abram and Sarai failed to have children. So Sarai suggested

they build a family through her maidservant Hagar and Abram agreed. He fathered a son Ishmael with Hagar and Ishmael had twelve sons who became patriarchs of the Arab nations. But Ishmael wasn't the son through whom God's covenant promises to Abram were to be fulfilled.

When Abram reached ninety-nine years of age, the LORD told him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers" (Genesis 17:1,2). This was the LORD revealing his all-sufficient and all-powerful nature as *El Shaddai* or God Almighty who makes possible what seems impossible.

A new name Abraham, meaning 'father of many,' was given to Abram and this covenant was sealed by circumcision. Cutting away the foreskin was symbolic of depending on the mighty power of God rather than on flesh. One year later, Abraham and Sarah had a son named Isaac and it was a truly miraculous birth.

Abraham had reached the age of 100 years and Sarah 90 years, well past natural child-bearing age. It was through this miracle son Isaac that the covenant would be fulfilled. But Abraham would have his faith tested very severely while Isaac was a young man. God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering.

Despite all hope for descendants resting on Isaac, Abraham was obedient. He knew God could be trusted because God had revealed himself as a mighty creator **Elohim** who could bring the dead back to life if necessary. Abraham also knew God as a covenant-keeping **Jehovah** who could be fully trusted to bring to completion his promise of many descendants through Isaac

In addition, Abraham had a godly fear. The psalmist later wrote, “The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them” (Psalm 25:14). And God didn’t intervene until Abraham was about to thrust his knife through the very heart of his dearest possession Isaac.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

Genesis 22:12

Here is another principle we see repeated in the scriptures. God desires us to fear him in a way that promotes obedience (Ecclesiastes 12:13). A godly fear deters us from returning to our old ways once redeemed. Indeed, it’s through fear of the LORD that a man avoids evil (Proverbs 16:6). Noah even built the ark in holy fear to escape the judgment God said he was bringing on earth (Hebrews 11:7).

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Paul says to work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). Even Jesus warns us to fear God because he has power not only to kill, but to throw us into hell for eternity (Luke 12:5). No teacher faithful to Scripture will fail to teach it is right to fear a righteous, just, and holy God. And Abraham's willingness to obey God and sacrifice what was most precious reflected godly fear.

In time, Isaac's son Jacob fathered twelve sons, one of whom Joseph was sold to Arab traders on the way to Egypt as a slave by brothers jealous of favored treatment he received from their father. But God granted protection and favor to Joseph and he was elevated to a position second only to that of Pharaoh. When his brothers came to Egypt because of a famine to buy grain, they found Joseph in a position of great authority.

Joseph's entire family came to live in Egypt and he forgave his brothers: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). By God's providence, the family from which a nation would develop was preserved. Over the next four centuries, they increased in number to more than two million and prospered.

During that time, something else took place. Life in Egypt corrupted the very image of

God held by Israel. This would become obvious when they took small gold idols from Egypt and later chose to worship a golden calf. It is similar to what exists today as America immerses itself in pleasure and materialism. Hell itself is spilling out as Christian denominations are willing to accept homosexuality as an alternate lifestyle.

Over the ages, moral corruption and decline of spiritual values have taken place in the setting of prosperity. There's such worldliness in the church today that a God so deserving reverence is usually given less respect than sitting judges in the courtroom. Many believers are complacent, no longer seeking the will of God. Their spiritual leaders fall to greed, preaching prosperity instead of self-denial so their own extravagance won't be criticized. And ministry scandals resulting from sexual immorality are epidemic in America.

The church has entered a state of slumber. When sacrificial living is stressed, sheep seek those shepherds who confine teaching to prosperity. We see *seeker-friendly churches* thrive by ignoring the wrath of God for willful disobedience. Worship is invaded by Broadway with treasured hymns being replaced by music more suitable for rock concerts. Focus on the blood of Jesus and his demand for our submission to his lordship is often replaced by a social agenda.

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Widely promoted cheap grace deceives so many into believing they're saved just because they said a sinner's prayer. But they've never repented of lifestyles in the playground of Satan. Not a shred of evidence indicates a changed life. Sin has been sugar-coated as a mistake and grace is presented as a frosting of mercy guaranteed to cover a lifelong cake of deliberate unrepented disobedience to the will of God. It's the kind of teaching Paul says to expect in these last days.

“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.” 2 Timothy 4:3,4

Some will no doubt consider this an unduly negative view of the spiritual climate in America. But Jesus' letters to churches in Revelation warn of increasing spiritual decline as do other passages (Matthew 24:10-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1). The Exodus concerns a nation that had lost its spiritual compass, and exactly the same thing applies to us in America today to a great extent.

Deception keeps this spiritual decline from being discussed openly. Preachers only rarely warn

of God's wrath over sin, so people fail to repent of what scriptures say keep us from inheriting eternal life: greed, envy, uncontrolled anger, drunkenness (including drug abuse), impure desires, and sexual immorality including adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, pornography and enjoyment of sensuous movies, not to mention sex-laced television as well as sex-laced novels (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:5,6).

On the other hand, the Exodus concerns a people the LORD calls his treasured possession. It's a situation not unlike today if we recall that God loves the world so much that he sent his one and only Son to die so that our sins might be forgiven. God earnestly desires everyone to repent and to be delivered from a world which Egypt represents so that no one might perish (2 Peter 3:9).

This story contains important lessons for all who struggle to escape a grip that sin has taken on their life. There are also lessons for those who have already escaped from bondage to addiction or other life-controlling issues, lest they fail to persevere to the end. For while God works salvation into the heart of men, it's the responsibility of men to work out salvation through obedience to God's will. We must never be satisfied with the experience of once having escaped Egypt (Matthew 7:21).

2. Trials and Tests of Faith

Jacob's descendants prospered in Egypt but it was not God's intention for them to remain there once the famine ended. Their inheritance was to be Canaan. However, life in Egypt proved seductive. Flocks had multiplied, the food was plentiful, and the people were enslaved by comfort. Thoughts of returning to a land God promised their forefathers faded, and nothing changed until a new king came into power.

The new Pharaoh grew increasingly anxious about the number of Israelites and feared that they might turn rebellious. So he assigned slave masters to create hardships in sharp contrast to their former comfort. Forced labor made life bitter, and no relief was in sight. Then the Pharaoh ordered all the male Hebrew babies killed at birth to control population growth. It was in this setting Moses was born.

Placed in a basket along a bank of the Nile, Moses was discovered by the daughter of Pharaoh as she bathed. Raised as her own child, Moses then spent forty years living in splendor rarely equaled in world history. But Moses was fully aware of his heritage as a Hebrew. God's providence saw that his own mother was asked to care for young Moses during childhood, and she had opportunity to teach him about his roots.

Moses might have taken advantage of this situation, but instead he chose to identify with the suffering of his people. One day he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew, perhaps thinking he could relieve his people's plight by his own means. But his life fell into jeopardy when Pharaoh learned what happened. To escape punishment, Moses fled to the Sinai where he spent the next forty years as a shepherd. He never could have imagined that God was preparing him to guide Israel through the very same desert where he was tending sheep for Jethro, his father-in-law.

During this time in exile, life back in Egypt grew increasingly severe for the Hebrews. Finally they cried to the LORD for help. Then Moses came to the mountain called Horeb while tending flocks and there he saw a remarkable sight. A bush was on fire and as Moses moved closer, God called to him from within the burning bush.

“Do not come closer,” God said. ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.’

“The LORD said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.’”

Exodus 3:5,7,10

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Moses asked who he should say had sent him to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. God told him to say: “**I AM** has sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14). Here the Creator of the universe gives himself a personal name as an eternal and covenant-keeping God whose desire is to redeem his people and meet their needs for living in victory. And it is from this name that comes the Hebrew *Yahweh* or **Jehovah**.

Assured of God’s help, Moses then returns to Egypt and goes to the Pharaoh with his brother Aaron. “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let my people go so that they may worship me.’” But Pharaoh reacts by demanding that even more work be produced by the Israelites, and this causes both Moses and Aaron to fall into disfavor among their own people.

In spite of this, Moses and Aaron continue to approach the Pharaoh demanding release. And to promote cooperation by the Pharaoh, God begins to send devastating plagues on the Egyptians. The king promises to release Israel if God grants relief from the plagues, but repeatedly fails to keep his word.

Finally God determines to send a plague to kill every firstborn son as well as firstborn cattle. Provision is made, however, so the nation of Israel will be spared. God gives the following instructions to Moses for the Israelites to follow so they might escape the wrath of this plague:

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“The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over fire, along with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast.”

Exodus 12:5-8

At midnight on that fateful night, God came to strike down every firstborn Egyptian son as well as firstborn animal. Blood of the lambs on Hebrew homes shielded those families, causing God to pass over. The name of Passover comes from the wrath of the LORD having passed over those who obeyed his command to apply blood of a sacrificed lamb to the doorframes of their homes.

Eating roasted meat identified people with death of the animal whose blood had given protection. Eating bread without yeast was a symbol of separating from sin, yeast being a corrupting agent that causes fermentation. Eating of bread without yeast continued for seven days in what was known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Passover was to be celebrated yearly thereafter.

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God declared the failure to remove all yeast from their homes during this seven day feast was cause to be cut off from people of Israel. This has application to the Christian life as will be discussed later. Furthermore the Passover meal was not to be eaten in a casual manner.

“This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD’s Passover.”

Exodus 12:11

God knew the chance to leave Egypt would be short-lived once the Pharaoh gave permission. So they were prepared to move very quickly when he called to Moses, “Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go worship the LORD as you have requested” (Exodus 12:31). As they left, God led the Egyptians to offer Israel great quantities of silver, gold and clothing. They had lived in Egypt exactly 430 years to the day when they departed.

The Pharaoh quickly had a change of mind, and sent his horsemen and chariots after the fleeing Israelites. As they drew close, the people cried to Moses, “What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians?’ It would have

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been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” To this complaint, Moses replied,

“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

Exodus 14:13-14

Moses was instructed by the LORD to raise his staff over the Red Sea. As he did so, the waters divided and the Israelites miraculously crossed on dry ground. The Egyptians tried to follow, but God threw them into confusion and caused the wheels of their chariots to fall off. The LORD told Moses to stretch his hand over the sea once again, and water flowed back over the Egyptian army. Not a single one of their soldiers survived.

This incredible event completed deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. After water covered the army of Pharaoh, Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, took a tambourine and danced, exclaiming, “Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and rider he has hurled into the sea” (Exodus 15:21). Israel then began their journey to the land promised to their forefathers by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

3. Lessons to be Learned

The spiritual condition in America today is similar to that of Israel during early years in Egypt. Many are enslaved by comfort, and dependance on God is buried in a grave of self-sufficiency. While many profess Jesus, their lives are in bondage to a variety of life-controlling issues including alcohol, drugs, food, immorality, greed and people-worship that is called co-dependency. They lack any witness to a lost world and spend their days in what's been called quiet desperation.

One of the missing ingredients in the church today is godly fear, and God will afflict those who lack fear of him and cling to their worldly ways (Psalm 55:19; Amos 4). God does this from a heart of love, knowing some will be willing to repent only if their comfort is invaded. Except for affliction, Israel might have never left Egypt with its idolatry. Adversity can be a blessing as some who were once hopelessly addicted have learned after many years of denial. The psalmist himself wrote of this when he admitted the following:

“Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.”

Psalm 119:67,71

Affliction that makes us willing to change can take many forms. It can be death of a loved one or divorce, financial ruin, serious illness, or despair from addiction. In years of medical practice, I saw illness draw many out of darkness into the light of Christ. Now I'm watching incarceration bring conviction of sin along with godly sorrow that results in repentance leading to salvation.

Little hope exists for those enslaved until they're willing to admit being powerless. It's true for us as it was for Israel when they finally called to the LORD in misery. Unfortunately our behavior can also be like that of the Pharaoh. We make promises to God when problems arise but suffer memory loss as soon as relief takes place.

This is so unwise. It is better to never make a vow to God than fail to keep it. "If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the LORD your God will demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin" (Deuteronomy 23:21).

The first of *Twelve Steps* used in programs for recovery from addiction states *we admit life is unmanageable and that we're powerless to change in our own strength*. Until we become truly willing to admit this, any kind of recovery will be difficult if not impossible to sustain. God may well allow us to continue heading downhill until we are humbled by our self-afflicted misery.

Those who struggle with addictive behavior usually can't stop on their own. Behind escape into addictive behavior are patterns of thinking called *strongholds* in the Bible (2 Corinthians 10:5). They are called this because of the strong hold they have on our behavior. In fact, the more we focus on a given temptation, the stronger it's likely to become.

As Paul explained, "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing" (Romans 7:18, 19). It's like this with addictions. We desire to stop and desperately so, but can't do it in our own strength. So how are strongholds destroyed?

First of all, it's rarely possible by *willpower* alone. Strongholds can be so firmly fixed that we have neither the *will* nor the *power* to change. This is why Paul insists on using weapons having divine power like faith, prayer, and the Word of God (2 Corinthians 10:4). When testing or temptation comes, it's critical that we run to Jesus for help!

This is what led Paul to exclaim, "Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 7:24, 25). God alone was capable of delivering Israel in their bondage. And breaking free of life-controlling issues depends just as much on God if our freedom is to be total and permanent.

Realizing need for God's help is a second step in recovery...*coming to believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore our lives to sanity.* We must come to fully trust that God can do for us as he's done for others. This demands that we set aside what the world promotes like new age psychology and methods of behavior modification often taught in recovery programs.

Man is born with a sinful nature, and until God is allowed to renew the mind, lives continue to be corrupt. Change in beliefs will change behavior, not the other way around. Until thinking changes – changing beliefs – we won't experience permanent change in behavior. Psychology and various means of self-help merely block the supernatural flow of God's grace into our lives.

Israel had little hope for escape at first. This is true for many in addiction. Things may even get worse as when Moses asked Pharaoh to free them. But faith increased when Israel saw God acting on their behalf with plagues. And testimony by those set free of addiction brings hope to those who are still bound. Faith only needs to increase a little.

“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be im-possible for you.” Matthew 17:20,21

The grace of God can never be emphasized enough. There's no way to deserve the grace that permits us to be reconciled with God and set free of sin and Satan. But a response of faith is required to receive the gift of deliverance. This means heartfelt trust in Jesus, truly giving him control of our lives (Romans 10:9). This is the third of the *Twelve Steps* in recovery...*making the decision to turn our will and life over to the care of God.*

Here is where recovery often stumbles. To turn our will and lives over to the care of God only happens if we are willing to accept a major change in management. Too often we want to remain in the driver's seat and surrender only minor decisions to God. This keeps us captive to the ways of thinking called strongholds which are contrary to the will of God (2 Corinthians 10:4,5).

Deliverance of Moses and his people from Egypt illustrates salvation. They were set free from Pharaoh's grasp, just as we can be set free from the power of sin and addiction if we do this third step sincerely. As with Israel, we must be ready to leave the old life and all that represents behind when the opportunity arises. When the Holy Spirit opens the door to escape by bringing us to a place of godly sorrow over our past, we must be willing and ready to repent and then do so without delay. This is why the Bible tells us,

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So as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Hebrews 3:7,8

Only the Holy Spirit can bring the heart to godly sorrow for sin. Our responsibility is to repent and turn to God by placing faith in Jesus alone for salvation and deliverance. Israel left without delay when Pharaoh gave permission, and we also must respond in haste when convicted by God of leading a wayward life. To refuse doing so risks hardening of the heart. And God will not endlessly draw us if we insist on rebelling against his revealed will for our lives (Proverbs 1:20-33).

Another Passover instruction was removing yeast from their homes. This symbolizes cleansing of one’s life from corruption with help of the Spirit (Romans 8:13). Cheap grace offered by false prophets offers salvation without God’s demand to repent, but we must do what is illustrated by the removal of yeast. It concerns the 4th step in recovery, that of *making a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves*. Scripture tells us, “Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD” (Lamentations 3:40).

Beware of teaching that grace is so cheap that repentance isn’t necessary for salvation. To

repent involves examining our ways and turning to the ways of the Lord. Jesus instructed his disciples to preach “repentance and forgiveness of sins,” not simply confession as some preach (Luke 24:47). The scriptures are specific that only repentance leads to salvation (e.g., Luke 13:3; Acts 3:19,20; 2 Corinthians 7:10).

For decades, I attended churches where the demand of God to repent was compromised. So I repeatedly confessed sins, being fully convinced of my forgiveness. Meanwhile I sank ever deeper into alcoholism, drug abuse and sexual immorality. The false gospel I was hearing affected me like medical vaccination in a sense.

Damaged virus doesn’t grow when given as a vaccine, yet it produces immunity against healthy virus. This occurs spiritually when a salvation plan is offered that ignores God’s demand to repent. We can be deceived and left immune to the true gospel that demands not only trusting God to manage our lives but also cleansing of sin (Romans 8:12,13).

The Passover and feast of unleavened bread foreshadow a New Testament demand for holiness in our lives. Failure to remove all yeast was cause for being cut off from Israel. In the same way, we are commanded to purify ourselves from everything that contaminates both body and spirit out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Those who teach that grace removes human responsibility for living holy lives are godless men who change the grace of God into a license for immorality (Jude 4). It's a lie from the pit of hell that we can inherit heaven by accepting Jesus as Savior apart from obeying him as the Lord of our lives (Matthew 7:21).

Jesus didn't come to earth simply to pay the penalty *for* our sins. He also came to end the power of sin and deliver us *from* our sins. Yet many who profess Christ continue to live as prisoners of the past. They fail to heed God's command to confess sins to one another and pray for each other so that we may be healed (James 5:16).

This concerns the 5th step in recovery...*to confess to God, to ourselves and to another person the exact nature of our wrongs*. Confessing wrongs to another person destroys the power of denial. It's said we're as sick as our secrets, and the power of secrets is broken if we bring them into the light by confessing them to someone we trust.

Many describe heavy weights of guilt and shame lifted as they *experience* the truth of God's forgiveness in doing this step. Forgiveness comes by repenting and making confession to God. But the *experience* of forgiveness is often not felt until pride is set aside and confession made to a person who can be trusted to hold a confidence.

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We find another lesson illustrated by what took place when Israel left Egypt. It's so important for those who want to overcome life-controlling issues like addiction. The lesson is to follow God's leading after making a decision to turn our will and life over to his care. God did not allow Israel the freedom of taking the shortest route when they left Egypt. Neither does God usually want us taking the shortest route after conversion.

“When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, ‘If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.’ So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.”

Exodus 13:17-18

God realized that Israel would be tempted to return to Egypt if quickly faced with any severe testing or temptation after deliverance. “There is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to death” (Proverbs 14:12). People often try to make changes while taking shortcuts and end up in Philistine country through fellowship with their old friends or resuming an old job filled with snares. In time, they learn that not allowing God to lead has resulted in return to bondage in Egypt.

Philistine country doesn't necessarily mean return to a life of crime. It can be returning to a life emphasizing pleasure instead of focus on spiritual growth. It can be returning to ungodly relationships or devotion to work at expense of fellowship with believers, study of scripture, faithfulness in prayer and service to the Lord. Allowing anything to have a priority only Jesus deserves is *idolatry* and living in the country of Philistines.

This passage also tells that Israel went from Egypt armed for battle. But they lacked experience in use of their weapons. New converts also have spiritual weapons available but lack experience in their use. They are unprepared for intense spiritual battle especially if addiction is an issue. It's critical to avoid temptation whenever possible early on in recovery. One must learn how to dress in the full armor of God as well as take all thoughts captive in obedience to Christ (Ephesians 6; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6).

New believers often are like seed that falls on rocky soil or among thorns in a parable told by Jesus (Luke 8:4-15). They receive the gospel with joy upon hearing it, but have no root. Although "they believe for a while," they fall away in the time of testing. Some claim these aren't true believers who fall away. However, the Greek used in this passage is identical to that used for belief unto salvation in other passages of Scripture.

Seed that falls among thorns in the parable stands for those having their spiritual life “choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures.” Jesus tells us clearly that it’s quite possible to make a sincere beginning (leaving Egypt in obedient faith) and yet fall away. And taking shortcuts after leaving Egypt is often the reason. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is much more than a conversion experience.

Ours is a microwave age looking for quick results. But the kingdom of heaven isn’t like that. Leaving Egypt is only the first step. As Paul says, we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). After we escape Egypt, it’s naive to expect an immediate entrance into the promised land. More often, we find ourselves spending time in the desert.

When new converts do not expect to spend time in the desert, they may question leaving Egypt in the first place. This is why Jesus tells us to count the cost before choosing to follow him (Luke 14:25-33). One must resist the temptation to look back as did Lot’s wife. Jesus warns that no one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62).

For this reason, new believers must be told that spending time in the desert is needed to mature in a life of faith. Jesus himself underwent testing in the desert before beginning his ministry. It was in

this time that Satan made every effort to detour the Son of God from following the way of the cross for which he came to earth. Jesus refused to accept the bait, and left the desert both empowered and fully prepared for ministry. And this brings us to a final lesson from this part of the Exodus story.

The desert is never intended as a place of punishment. It's a place of preparation as we'll see in the next chapter. So if things haven't been going smoothly since receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, don't despair. You've been forgiven as well as delivered from the power of sin and Satan. The same God who redeemed you also has plans to bless you and give you hope and a future. Remain patient, continue to wait on him, and you'll find both your strength and serenity renewed.

A Truth to Remember

***If you find yourself struggling in Egypt,
“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that
your sins may be wiped out, that times of
refreshing may come from the Lord, and
that he may send the Christ who has been
been appointed for you –even Jesus.”***

Acts 3:19,20

Part II

THE DESERT

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter.

So the people grumbled against Moses.

Exodus 15:22-24

Part 2. *THE DESERT*

1. Background

The Israelites were unwilling to leave the land of Egypt while life was comfortable. But once Pharaoh's slave masters began to oppress them, to escape became the cry of their hearts. Then God intervened to do what Israel could not do for itself. A series of plagues sent to torment Egypt ended when the angel of the LORD killed first-born sons of each Egyptian family. At last Pharaoh's resistance was broken and permission was granted for Moses and his people to depart Egypt in order to worship God and travel to a land promised the descendants of Abraham.

But the Passover was not a passive event. Israel was required to obey the instructions of God. First came selecting male lambs free of defect that foretold Jesus as the sinless Lamb of God. Next came sacrifice of the lambs, foretelling the death of Jesus as ransom for our sins. Blood of these lambs had to be applied to the doorframes of houses just as we must apply Jesus' blood by faith to the door of our hearts. And removal of all yeast from homes was a picture of God's demand for holiness.

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Arriving at the Red Sea, Israel found itself trapped between the sea and approaching chariots of the Pharaoh. It seemed a mistake had been made in leaving Egypt and people rebuked Moses in lack of faith despite miraculous events that gained their release. They failed to realize God had deliberately led them to a place where his mighty power could be revealed on their behalf.

None other than the LORD had guided them by day in a pillar of cloud and at night in a pillar of fire to the very spot it appeared their lives were in jeopardy. The only calm person in the face of this apparent disaster was Moses who said, *“Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today* (Exodus 14:13).

The water parted when Moses stretched his staff over the sea as God told him. Not only did the water pile up many stories high. The bottom of the sea immediately became dry as two million people crossed with their flocks of animals. Meanwhile, God kept the Egyptians in darkness though it was supernaturally light where Israel was crossing.

At daybreak, Egyptian soldiers and chariots started crossing as well, but the LORD caused the wheels of their chariots to fall off. The Egyptians recognized intervention of God on behalf of Israel and cried out, “Let’s get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them.” But it was too late.

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Water was flowing back over Pharaoh's army and not a single Egyptian survived. Seeing the power of God manifested so mightily led the Israelites to celebrate and they sang to the LORD:

“Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?
Who is like you — majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory, working wonders? You
stretched out your right hand and the earth
swallowed them. In your unfailing love, you
will lead the people you have redeemed. In
your strength you will guide them to your holy
dwelling.”

Exodus 15:11

Miriam took a tambourine and the women followed her in dancing and singing. Life had never been better. What they failed to realize was that a season of testing lie ahead. These trials were meant for their benefit just as trials have a divine purpose in our lives. But Israel lacked insight into the ways of God and failed to realize an important principle was being established.

It's a principle that applies to us as well. God will not lead people into the desert to abandon them. Satan wants us to think God doesn't love us or will leave us in time of trial. *But the desert is not meant as a place of punishment. It's a place of preparation for what's ahead, a place to develop increased faith and dependence on God.*

We should be able to grasp this on our side of Calvary. James even wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to encourage us during our trials in the desert places.

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when-ever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking any-thing.” James 1:2-4

2. Trials and Tests of Faith

After deliverance from the army of Pharaoh, Moses led people into the desert. After three days without finding water, they arrived at Marah where the water was too bitter to drink. The people forgot their earlier faith in God and grumbled. Moses was then shown a piece of wood by the LORD and threw it in the water. Immediately the water became sweet and fine for drinking. And God made a promise that follows the principle of *“if... then.”*

“If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes...[then] I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD who heals you.” Exodus 15:26

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This passage shows God's desire to heal us rather than inflict illness. He reveals himself as ***Jehovah-rophi***, meaning *the Lord who heals you*, and he's never changed over the years. The word *rophi* occurs frequently in the Old Testament and means to restore or heal, and not just physically but in a spiritual and moral sense as well.

God pledges himself as being a Healer with the condition of obedience. *If* they do what is right in his eyes, *then* he'll shield them from all diseases sent upon the Egyptians. How foolishly we expect God to heal sickness in our bodies while refusing to let him destroy the devil's work in our hearts. Yet at times we expect him to do just that.

Next the Israelites left for Elim where they camped. Not only were there many springs at Elim, but palm trees that provided welcome shade. Then they came to the Desert of Sin where there was no food to their liking. Again we see God testing their faith and it's not necessary to guess exactly what happened. They grumbled as usual!

Nonetheless, God graciously fed them with bread called manna which fell from heaven and tasted something like wafers made with honey. He also provided quail for meat (Exodus 16:4). Here in the face of faithful provision, God also tested their willingness to obey by giving specific instructions for collection of manna:

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“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way, I will test and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day, they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.’” Exodus 16:4-5

Some disobeyed and gathered up more than needed, but manna kept until the next day was full of maggots and smelled badly. God also told them to gather twice as much manna on the sixth day of the week and to prepare the extra for the next day. He was giving them a day called the Sabbath to be set aside for rest and worship. But some insisted on going out for manna on the seventh day and found nothing for their efforts.

The next stop in the journey was Rephidim. Again the Israelites learned they had set up camp in a place lacking water. As thirst increased, so did bitter complaining directed toward Moses: “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” By this time, all this grumbling was beginning to weigh heavily on their leader Moses. And he cried out to the LORD in his frustration and was told to do the following:

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“Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock and water will come out of it for the people to drink.”

Exodus 17:5,6

Moses did as he was told and enough water flowed from the rock to satisfy the needs not only for the people but animals as well. Paul says the rock from which people drank was Christ as God again revealed his character as ***Jehovah-jireh*** (*The LORD will provide*) through miraculous provision when no natural means existed.

At Rephidim they came under attack by the Amalekites. Moses remained on a hill holding the staff of God while Joshua and his men fought. As long as his hands were lifted to heaven, Israel was winning. But whenever Moses lowered his hands, the enemy began to gain. So Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms when he became tired.

In this way, he was able to keep calling on the LORD, making victory possible over the enemy. Moses built an altar calling it ***Jehovah-nissi*** which means *the LORD is my Banner* (Exodus 18:15). This altar was a reminder that our hope for victory lies in God and that we must run to his name alone for safety in times of tribulation (Proverbs 18:10).

Moses' father-in-law Jethro came to visit and watched his son-in-law work from early in the morning until evening settling disputes. He asked Moses why he sat alone to judge. "What you are doing is not good....the work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Exodus 18:18).

Moses followed his father-in-law's advice and appointed others to assist as long as they met certain qualifications: fear of the LORD, trustworthiness, being capable and not greedy. By sharing the responsibility in this way, Moses could endure the strain of leadership and was able to govern more effectively.

Moses then sent his father-in-law home as Israel continued on its journey. In the third month after leaving Egypt, they arrived at the mountain Horeb [Mount Sinai] where the cloud of the LORD settled in place. Israel proceeded to set up camp at the base of the very mountain where Moses earlier had encountered the burning bush.

3. Lessons to be Learned

Israel had to admit to being in bondage and call upon God for help before they were delivered, a pattern identical to the first three steps in *Twelve Step* for recovery. Yet deliverance from the land of

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Egypt was only the first step in their journey. In the same way, committing one's life to Jesus Christ is really only the first step in a life of faith.

The desert must be seen for what it is meant to accomplish in a life of faith. We can be so near-sighted in our walk with Jesus that we don't realize time spent in the desert is not meant as punishment. The words of Isaiah as he foretold the ministry of John the Baptist tell the purpose of the desert in the life of a believer:

“A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert pre-
pare the way for the LORD; make straight in the
wilderness a highway for our God. Every
valley shall be raised up, every mountain and
hill made low...and the glory of the LORD will
be revealed.’”

Isaiah 40:3-5

The desert is a place to begin straightening our lives and build a highway called the “*Way of Holiness*” (Isaiah 35:8). It's a place for mountains of pride to be brought low and hills of dead religion to be set aside. It's where we learn to depend on God if water and food (symbols of what's truly needed to sustain us) seem to be absent.

God's ultimate purpose is to bring us into perfect union with himself. That can only be done by faith, and we're tested in the desert to see if we

are willing to live by faith. The desert is intended to prepare us for trusting in a way that brings us to close intimacy with our Lord and Savior.

Moses told Pharaoh that God wanted Israel set free so his people could worship him. Trials in the desert were to prepare worshipers for just that. God looks for those who worship in spirit and in truth, not simply those who leap for joy after great victories. He expects our worship in times of trial to show that our trust in him is unshakeable.

Few things reveal the flesh like rebelling in our tests. Bitter water at Marah was a picture of the bitterness in hearts of the people. It was just fine to leave Egypt with full stomachs after the Passover meal. And crossing the Red Sea was exciting. But would the Israelites persevere in faith?

Now life wasn't going according to their understanding. Gratefulness for all that God had already done on their behalf was absent. Instead a defiling spirit of bitterness developed as it can with us if we're inclined to grumble and complain in our own times of testing.

We can even hold onto bitterness over past experiences such as childhood rejection and abuse. Such bitterness can exercise such a grip on us that adult relationships are defiled as well. What is the remedy? The cross of Jesus symbolized by wood Moses threw into bitter water to make it sweet!

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There were lessons to be learned from God providing manna and then telling the people to not collect any on the Sabbath. But these are lost on so many today. Jesus identifies himself as true bread that has come down from heaven (John 6:35,51), yet so many in the church try to satisfy their hunger in other ways. Some even work seven days a week, but fail to profit just like those Israelites who failed to find any manna on the Sabbath.

A problem with prosperity is that it usually dampens dependance on God. Excess manna that some Israelites collected had a foul odor the next day; and effort to fill our barns with wealth creates a foul odor in the nostrils of God. Jesus warns that what is highly valued among men is detestable in the sight of our heavenly Father (Luke 16:15). We're to always be on guard against greed the Bible calls idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5).

God is jealous to be our security, and he is offended if wealth or materialism becomes a focus. Those working seven days a week for excess are turning backs on God's gift to man of the Sabbath as a time for spiritual as well as physical renewal. His command to keep the Sabbath holy is not set aside under the new covenant any more than is his command to not commit murder, adultery or steal. But these commandments are being distorted to simply mean suggestions in these last days.

Instead of turning to Christ as the rock from which to drink during desert experiences, many dig wells in their own strength and repeatedly fail to find water that truly satisfies. They never enjoy the inheritance into which believers are called in Jesus. God's grace can never be received when we strive in our own strength. We'll never see the desert as working for our good when the flesh still reigns.

The desert is where rubber really meets the road. As Jesus tells us, the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing and forceful men take hold of it (Matthew 11:12). This has been lost on the church in our day. Those who desire to leave Egypt and enter the promised land must forcefully take hold of that which God offers us by grace.

The kingdom of heaven is not for people who compromise with the world and rarely pray or meditate on Scripture. It's not for those who refuse to let the desert refine them and increase their faith. Such people are like Israelites who complained, "It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than die in the desert" (Exodus 14:12).

Israel insisted on focusing on the temporal and seen instead of the eternal and unseen. How prophetic this is of us! We cry to be delivered, but turn away in unbelief when our faith level is tested. We must be careful to not ignore the consequences that befell the Israelites who acted that way.

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“He saved them from the hand of the foe; from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them. The waters covered their adversar-ies; not one of them survived. Then they believed his promises and sang his praise. But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel. In the desert they gave in to their craving, and put God to the test. So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them.” Psalm 106:10-15

It would be nice to develop strong abiding faith without spending time in the desert. It would also be nice for women to have babies without the need to go through pregnancy. But both are wishful thinking. Deep faith does not develop on mountain tops. It grows in deserts and dark tunnels. Only in such places do we learn to appreciate the hope we have in Christ Jesus.

Just as God guided Israel with a cloud by day and pillar of fire at night, he'll guide our way. Yet don't we question God's faithfulness? Placing our lives in the hands of God is such a high hurdle for most of us. The battle with the Amalekites is an illustration of what happens when we rely on ourselves. Divine help doesn't come. Only as Moses' hands stretched up toward the throne of grace in heaven did God help Israel.

Again, Jesus is revealed as *Jehovah-nissi* and in the staff of God Moses held up, we have the cross being foretold. Moses interceding is also a foretelling of Jesus who “is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us”(Romans 8:34). We show such lack of wisdom at times by trying to do what’s only possible with God’s help.

Israel’s moving with the presence of God in the cloud pictures our need to keep in step with the Spirit. It’s the only way to avoid giving in desires of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:16-18). Anyone who refuses to be guided by the Spirit will find himself doing what pleases flesh. And warnings are stern to not mock God by sowing to please the flesh lest we reap destruction (Galatians 6:7,8).

We don’t have a cloud to follow, we’re not left to stumble in the darkness either. God has sent his Spirit to indwell us as a guide and the word of God is given to us as a light for our path (Psalm 119: 105). In addition, we have the assurance of constant access to the throne of grace by prayer.

A loving and merciful Jesus continuously intercedes for us as well, and if we’ll humbly call on him, he’ll answer. On the other hand, we’re not forced to learn lessons. As a result, some spend far too much time in the desert because of *denial*. We keep repeating the same behaviors while expecting different results...something called insanity.

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Denying strongholds that need demolishing is a good way to stay in the desert for a long time. It takes hitting a hard bottom before some are willing to change. Certainly it was true for me. And if we refuse to learn lessons God wants to teach us in the desert, the promised land will elude us.

We'll leave behind a pile of broken dreams and wounded people. Some must reach a place of utter misery before we're willing to accept that it's far better to follow the directions of God than to keep relying on our own broken compass.

When Israel arrived at Sinai, they'd come to a place chosen by God to set up camp. We must do the same if we seek the best God has for us. He must decide where we live, where we worship and work, with whom we fellowship, and exactly how we spend our money as well as leisure time.

If we refuse to give the Lord control over these decisions, victorious living will escape us. We can't work where godly standards are ignored. As in marriage, being yoked unequally in business is a serious risk. And biblical conditions exist for deciding where to worship.

Choice must be based on commitment to God's Word, not on family tradition or where old friends attend. The bottom line must be where the *whole* counsel of God's Word is taught. Otherwise godly standards are certain to be compromised.

One must be cautious if people are asked to simply say a prayer to be saved. No one enters the kingdom of heaven unless *born again* (John 3:3-6), and new birth only occurs with commitment to the lordship of Jesus by grace through faith (Acts 3:19,20; Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Ephesians 2:8).

We must be wary if repentance – a *turning from* sins as well as *turning to* God through faith in Jesus – isn't demanded. Easy salvation has become standard in nearly all American churches, a cheap grace that ignores the sacrifice and suffering that is the lot of all who sincerely follow Jesus.

We must also be wary if the ministry of the Holy Spirit including spiritual gifts like healing is not recognized (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). This ministry is gone from the spiritual landscape of most churches and proclaiming the gospel is no longer confirmed by signs and wonders as in the early NT church (Acts 4: 29,30; 5:12-16; 6:8; 8:6ff; 14:3).

Another caution sign is prosperity teaching. False prophets abound who twist biblical warnings about riches because of greed. And people prefer to gather around those who say what itching ears like to hear. Prosperity is a far more appealing subject than God's demand for holiness.

Finally, examine peoples' lives for signs of spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22). Do you see purity and righteousness along with ever- increasing love for

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the needy? Do a large number labor in harvesting of souls? Or do they attend one service on Sunday and live like the world the rest of the week?

Remember that God's plan for you is likely to include a desert experience to prepare you for what lies ahead. It may prove difficult and require you to daily practice a motto that says, *Let go and let God*. And don't be surprised if uncertainty and frustration prove trying as your faith is tested. It may even seem old times of peace and joy as a new believer are forever gone.

Such thoughts come from Satan, the father of lies. We have God's assurance he'll never let us to be tested beyond what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). So don't shrink back! God's purpose may be hidden from your understanding for the moment, but soon you'll find yourself praising God for what he was doing if you'll just stand firm.

Truth to Remember

The desert is where the redeemed are prepared for lives of service to God. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:11

Part III

MOUNT SINAI

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt - on the very day - they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

Exodus 19:1,2

Part III. *MOUNT SINAI*

1. The Background

All future generations would hear how God destroyed the Pharaoh's army, led Israel in a cloud by day and pillar of fire at night, and supernaturally provided food and drink during a journey to Sinai. The journey was not easy, however, but then life is seldom easy when major changes are required. And waiting for the cloud to move slowed progress, but Moses insisted that traveling without the guidance of God would risk disaster.

Complaining frequently took place as they traveled. Powerless in Egypt and having to depend totally on God to gain freedom, the Israelites now wanted to be in charge. But God still had to meet all needs and was passionate about deliverance of his treasured people. He was just as determined to bring them safely to Mount Sinai as a mother eagle who catches young eaglets on her wings while they are learning to fly.

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”

Exodus 19:4

EXODUS

The way events unfolded tell us a great deal about the ways of God. He was patient, yet allowed trials so Israel might develop greater faith based on his own faithfulness in guiding and providing. He works the same way in our lives. God prepares us through adversity to where we lose enough inborn self-sufficiency to accept his Son as our only hope. Then he bears with us as we slowly learn to follow his ways.

However, Israel failed to grasp the meaning of these events as they unfolded, even though God orchestrated their entire deliverance. In fact, God's hand was on every step of the journey. But lest we find fault, let's not forget our own blindness to the hand of God. Many of us recall facing disaster in years past, yet did not realize that God intervened to protect us from great danger.

The desert was an ideal place for Israel to learn lessons, but they were seldom willing to trust God in time of fierce testing. While God was ready to meet every need, they refused to be grateful for his grace. It's a picture that should be familiar. We can face life-controlling issues, and even admit that our lives are totally out of control with no power to change. Yet we cling tightly to our ways and refuse to submit our lives to God, preferring to grumble and blame our circumstances on others as did the Israelites in blaming Moses time after time.

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When Israel arrived at where God chose for them to camp, it was where Moses earlier met God in the burning bush. Moses had been sent to Egypt for what was finally accomplished. Those God had ordained to be his treasured possession had been delivered from Egypt and brought safely through the desert to Mount Sinai for two reasons.

The first was to worship the LORD, and the second was to receive God's plan for their life. He would make a covenant with those he'd chosen...a covenant known as the law of Moses...to give the Israelites the moral, civic, and spiritual regulations under which they were to live along with a system of sacrifices for atonement of sins.

God wanted to make it extremely clear to the Israelites that they would experience blessings and favor *if* they would obey his laws and decrees. His covenant with them would follow the principle of "*if...then*" that was established centuries earlier with their forefathers. As soon as camp had been set up at the foot of Mount Sinai, God gave this instruction to Moses:

"This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: "Now *if* you obey me fully and keep my covenant, *then* out of all nations you will be my treasured possession."

Exodus 19:3,5 [emphasis mine]

Israel would have the opportunity to make a critical decision after the covenant conditions had been explained. Blessings would be outlined and warning given about consequences if they failed to obey. Accountability for their behavior would then begin. Once God made his expectations clear, only deliberate rebellion would cause them to not apply the “*if...then*” principle to their daily lives.

2. Trials and Tests of Faith

As God began to reveal his will for Israel, the first step was *consecration*. Consecration is not just gratefulness for being delivered from bondage. It's willingness to separate from what's unholy out of love and dedication to God. For not only is God holy. Those wishing to be called by his Name must be holy. So Moses was instructed by God:

“Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.” Exodus 19:10-11

After consecration, symbolized by washing of clothes, the Israelites stood at the foot of Mount Sinai to meet with God. At once they were aware

of his holiness with a display of power that caused them to react with fear. The mountain was covered with smoke and shook violently while the sound of a trumpet grew steadily louder. God wanted fear as well as respect in the hearts of people so that they would live in obedience.

Faced with this awesome display of power, the people told Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die”(Exodus 20:19). The Israelites didn’t want personal confrontation with God just like so many today seek comfort from God but avoid confrontation with his holiness. And Moses replied in a way that applies to our generation:

“Do not be afraid. God has come to test you so the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.” Exodus 20:20

While Moses said to not be afraid, he told them to fear the LORD. This is repeated in Scripture many times and needs to be understood. We’re not to be afraid of anything, including death. But fear of the LORD is critical for spiritual health. It’s by fear of the LORD that men live holy lives (Proverbs 16: 6). Such fear is called the beginning of knowledge and wisdom by God (Proverbs 1:7; 9).

The attitude of Moses is different than that of others. Moses had a prior desert experience for

forty years. He'd already learned to submit to God. Pride and self-sufficiency were refined so that he was called the most humble man on earth (Numbers 12:3). In contrast, this awesome display of power by God caused others to retreat.

As they drew back, Moses entered the dark-ness surrounding God where he received the law and commandments. The law had three parts: the moral law for holy living that still applies; a civil law to govern the social and legal life at that time; and a ceremonial law that applied to worship with a system of sacrifices that provided atonement for unintentional sin.

But the law was not a means for Israel to obtain salvation. They were already under grace, saved by the blood of a Passover lamb. This is not well understood by many. The law was the means by which Israel might remain in the favor of God. And people readily accepted their responsibility to obey all the conditions set forth in the law.

“When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’s words and laws, they respond-ed with one voice, *‘Everything the LORD has said we will do.’* Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, *‘We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.’*”

Exodus 24:3-4,7 (italics added)

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With this promise, the people declared their commitment to steps six and seven of *Twelve Steps* for recovery: *Becoming entirely ready to have God remove our defects of character and humbly asking Him to do so.* Moses heard their promise to obey, and sprinkled the people with the blood of a bull: “This is the blood of the covenant the LORD made with you in accordance with all these words” (Exodus 24: 8). Then Moses went up the mountain to meet with God.

Meanwhile Aaron failed to maintain loyalty to God in the camp. People came to Aaron and said “Come, make us gods who will go before us.” This revealed how living in Egypt had utterly corrupted their image of God. Instead of rebuking the people, Aaron made a gold idol shaped like a calf and built an altar so that people could bring offerings. Then they sat down to eat, drink and indulge in sensuous revelry (Exodus 32:2-6).

When Moses returned, they were running wild and had become a cause for mocking by their enemies. What took place next is a stern warning for us about God’s attitude toward idolatry. God told Moses to call those “for the LORD” to his side. The Levites rallied and following the command of God went about the camp killing neighbors, friends and brothers alike for contempt shown a holy God by worship of an idol.

EXODUS

Three thousand Israelites were slaughtered and the LORD also sent a plague that killed many more. It was a sad chapter in the history of people God had chosen to bless as his treasure. The LORD also told Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book (Exodus 32:33). Teachers of eternal security fail to realize that these words foretell Jesus telling us that only those who overcome will not have their names blotted out from the book of life (Revelation 3:5).

In addition to the law, Moses was given instructions by God to build a tabernacle. “Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8). This tabernacle housed the ark containing tablets of the covenant, a jar of manna, and Aaron’s staff. Upon completing this sanctuary, it was filled with the LORD’s glory. The cloud of his Presence remained over it and Israel never broke camp until this cloud moved.

Aaron and his sons were ordained priests, but two sons placed incense and fire in their own censers, an act reserved for the high priest. To offer incense this way showed a lack of fear of the LORD. Fire came from his Presence and consumed them (Leviticus 10:2). They may have been under the influence of alcohol as God then told Aaron that intoxicating wine was never to be used by anyone serving in his sanctuary (Leviticus 10:9).

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God made a promise at this time that he'd send his angel before them to protect them and bring them safely into Canaan. One condition for this protection was that they not rebel against the LORD by mixing with pagans living in the land. So again we see God's principle of "*if... then*" being connected with his promises.

"I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. Little by little, I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. Do not make covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against me because worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you."

Exodus 23:27,30,32-33

God's plan was to drive out all the pagans "little by little" until they completely occupied the land. The people pledged to avoid covenants with the pagans and their future was filled with hope at this point. They were free of bondage. God would guide them in a cloud by day and pillar of fire at night. He also promised protection and blessing, far more than they could have asked or imagined while they were still in Egypt.

But questions still remained. Would Israel practice what God had tried to teach in the desert? Would the people keep a pledge to live according to the covenant God established? Did they even recognize failings that needed correcting? Would they discard tiny gold idols they'd brought from Egypt and reserve their love and devotion for the One who had rescued them from bondage?

3. Lessons to be Learned

God told Moses at the burning bush that he wanted Israel to worship him at Sinai. Indeed no higher purpose exists for man than the worship of God. But worship is never acceptable without consecration. A psalmist asks, "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?" (Psalm 24:3). Then he answers, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (24:4). To worship as the Lord desires means being consecrated.

So consecration was top priority once the camp was set up. Washing clothes was a symbol of removing dirt so they could come to God with clean hands and a pure heart. It was a parallel to removing all yeast from the home at Passover and foreshadows a command given us, "Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Consecration involves more than asking forgiveness. It involves *turning away* from sin and *turning toward* God. Consecration represents the demand of God for repentance from acts that lead to death that were learned in Egypt. No one is able to live as God desires without a good scrubbing of Egypt's ways. It's why Paul says to examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

We're to ask, "Have I honestly set myself apart as the property of Jesus? Or do I resist washing the sinful ways of the world out of my life?" While Israel washed their clothes as God had said, they were hardly enthusiastic about repenting. In fact, they retreated from the mountain in order to avoid confronting the holiness of God.

Yet don't we do the same thing? Many of us refuse to purify ourselves of what contaminates body and spirit. True consecration is so ignored that holiness teaching is often called legalism. We have turned to happiness instead of holiness, and to prosperity instead of purity. Jesus speaks about those who'll "honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me" (Matthew 15:8).

Emphasis on genuine consecration is often compromised in fear of invading the comfort zone of lukewarm Christians whose wallets are needed to support church programs. Fear of the Lord has all but disappeared from the hearts of most who

profess Christ in America. We've sadly become like Israel, quite satisfied with being spectators at Mount Sinai instead of actually participating in an encounter with a holy God.

After the people consecrated themselves, Moses sprinkled them with the blood of sacrificed bulls, bringing the covenant into existence. This act of sprinkling blood foreshadows the words of Jesus in bringing the new covenant into existence through the shedding of his blood: "This is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin" (Matthew 26:28).

Israel had promised to obey God and those who take part in the Lord's Supper pledge to obey Christ. This is why Paul warns us about eating the bread or drinking the cup unworthily lest we bring judgment on ourselves. In the Lord's Supper, we not only remember Jesus' sacrifice. We commit ourselves to holy living as did Israel.

A sincerely consecrated person says "No" to sexual immorality, drugs, alcohol, greed, envy, impurity, bitterness and filthy talk. Out of love and devotion to God, consecrated people separate from unbelievers and from those who profess Christ but refuse to leave the ways of Egypt. There's a fervent desire to subdue fleshly passions and live in holiness by those who are sincerely consecrated.

Deception is epidemic that consecration is no longer required. Many resist putting to death the misdeeds of flesh. False teaching says it's possible to live both in Egypt and the promised land at the same time. Paul's warning is being ignored that if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die (Romans 8:13).

Jesus warns that only *overcomers* have the right to eat from the tree of life (Revelation 2:7), to not be hurt by the second death that is the lake of fire (2:11) and to not have their names blotted from the book of life (3:5). Lack of strong teaching causes so many to think they can live with besetting sins and still inherit heaven.

Let's not be deceived! Lukewarm, sin-beset Christians will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (Galatians 5:19-21; 6:7,8; Ephesians 5:5; Revelation 3:16). Those with unconsecrated lives won't be welcome. They will be cut off like the Israelites as many passages of Scripture explicitly warn (e.g., Romans 11:17-22).

“If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, will he live? None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness he is guilty of and because of sins he has committed, he will die.”

Ezekiel 18:24

EXODUS

When Israel arrived at Sinai, they'd reached a place of decision. God had revealed his love by redeeming them from Egypt and providing all that was necessary for survival in the desert. In spite of complaining, he'd remained merciful and faithful. Now God was calling for intimate obedience, and Israel had been given its marching orders.

This is a picture of the church today. Many relish the idea of being saved and having a measure of God's blessing. But they draw back like Israel, preferring a long distance relationship rather than intimacy. Absence of true repentance is typical of this attitude, when cravings of the flesh and lust of the eyes continue to be life-controlling issues.

In the next chapter, we see what happens as Israel breaks camp. God would go before them to drive out all enemies so they can possess the land. Jesus promises the same today for those willing to consecrate themselves: "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Truth to Remember

When God delivers us from Egypt, it's for a special reason. God says, "For I know the plans I have for you....plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

Part IV

WANDERINGS

Not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times – not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers.

Numbers 14:22,23

Part IV. *WANDERINGS*

1. The Background

One year after arriving at the foot of Mount Sinai, the Israelites prepared to leave. In their past was a miraculous deliverance from Egypt followed by remarkable provision and healing when not one person arrived at Mount Sinai either sick or feeble, foretelling the power of the cross to bring not only forgiveness but deliverance and healing.

During the year at Sinai, a relationship with God known as a covenant was established. Solemn responsibilities exist for both parties with covenant relationships. The promises of God to bless and to protect Israel were conditional and depended upon their obedience in keeping the laws which God had set before them under the law of Moses.

The Israelites had a consistent tendency to celebrate whenever they were blessed by God in a miraculous way. But they drew back whenever the glory of God exposed their heart condition. This is not difficult to understand. We're also drawn to the grace of God that blesses us but quickly withdraw at times if the Holy Spirit brings conviction of our sin or if severe persecution develops.

EXODUS

The Israelites wanted Moses to hear from God for them and that's not different today either. Many wait for the pastor to hear from God, making little effort on their own through prayer or study of Scripture. Yet we live under covenant relationship and a refusal to listen to and obey God will remove us from his favor as would happen with Israel (e.g., Matthew 7:21; John 15:2,6; Romans 11:22; Galatians 6:7,8).

Commitment was required to establish the covenant, and refusal to obey would result in a loss of blessings. God only promised his protection and blessings *if* Israel followed his laws and decrees. And these people who were under grace pledged obedience. Emphasis on this point is rarely heard. Distortion of grace has nearly silenced the demand of God for obedience under the new covenant.

The tabernacle was built and consecrated at Sinai, and sacrifices for atonement of *unintentional* sins resulting from human weakness were started. However the Israelites quickly learned that God is not tolerant of *deliberate* sin. The Sabbath was to be a sign of belonging to the LORD and unnecessary work was forbidden so the day might be devoted to rest from labor and worship of God.

When a man was found gathering firewood on the Sabbath, it was not clear what punishment should be delivered. So Moses asked the LORD who answered without hesitation: "This man must die.

The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp” (Numbers 15:35). No appeal was available for this intentional sin against the revealed will of God and the sentence was carried out immediately.

Annual feasts were set forth as celebrations to the LORD along with specific instructions, and it was learned that worship was a serious matter. God demanded his instructions be treated with greatest respect. So when Aaron’s sons offered up incense that was unauthorized, they died at once from fire coming out from the Presence of the LORD.

Worship of the golden calf nearly derailed the journey. God was so angered by their idolatry that he blotted out names in his book of those who took part. God threatened to stop going with Israel until Moses interceded fervently, a picture of Jesus interceding on our behalf. Yet despite experiencing God’s wrath on repeated occasions, they continued to resist submission to his will.

Before departing Mount Sinai, God ordered that a census be taken of all men eligible to fight. Then they left to occupy the land promised to their forefathers many centuries earlier. The distance to the border of Canaan was short so the journey took only eleven days. However when they complained about hardships along the way in the hearing of the LORD, he sent fire to consume part of their camp.

It's said that complaining is the first sign of drifting into frank disobedience against the will of God. Complaining says to God, "I don't like what you're doing in my life! I want things done my way without questions asked!" Grumbling must be seen this way through the eyes of heaven a great deal of the time, and Israel would find this attitude part of their eventual downfall.

Proverbs 22:4 tells us humility and fear of the LORD will bring wealth and honor and life. But humility and godly fear were badly lacking during the entire journey. Complaining was the order of the day and was followed by disobedience with all of its consequences. Judgment was just around the corner for a people ungrateful for God's grace.

2. Trials and Tests of Faith

Upon setting out from Mount Sinai, people immediately began to complain of hardships. Even Miriam and Aaron, the sister and brother of Moses, spoke against Moses because of jealousy. "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he also spoken through us?" (Numbers 12:2). God didn't like having his authority being questioned. As a result, Miriam was afflicted with leprosy and only by the intervention of Moses with God was she eventually restored to health.

WANDERINGS

At Kadesh on the border of Canaan, Moses sent a leader from each of the tribes to explore the land. The twelve spies returned after forty days with specimens of fruit they collected. They spoke of a land that did flow with milk and honey but ten of the twelve described those living in the land as being so powerful that they gave a bad report.

“And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size...we seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

Numbers 13:31-33

The other two spies, Caleb and Joshua, tore their clothes and pleaded with the assembly: “If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD” (Numbers 14:8,9). But the bad report prevailed and the people refused to trust God and enter Canaan.

Instead they grumbled as was their custom. “Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” It was a decision they’d quickly learn to regret. The refusal to enter the land promised their forefathers was seen as unbelief by God. His reaction to their

rebellion was not only swift. It was also extremely severe:

“No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see the promised land. In this desert, your bodies will fall - every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census, and who has grumbled against me...except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. For forty years - one year for each of the forty days you explored the land - you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.”

Numbers 14:23,29-30,34

The LORD sent a plague to kill the spies who brought a bad report. Hopeful of changing God's mind, others left the next day to enter Canaan and presumed on protection by God but were defeated. And even before leaving Kadesh, 250 leading men including Korah disagreed with God's decision to place Moses and Aaron in authority. God became so angered that he destroyed all these men with fire (Numbers 16:35). When others continued to complain, God sent a plague killing another 14,700 men.

Israel then began its years of wandering in the wilderness. It was a bitter reminder of having failed to trust God by refusal to enter the promised

land. Yet God continued to lead them with a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire at night. But even having the continued Presence of the Lord in their midst did not change their attitude. Paul says what took place is written down as warnings for us, lest we fail to realize there will be severe consequences for disobedience in our lives as well.

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warn-ings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” 1 Corinthians 10:11,12

When lack of water developed once again, so did complaining to Moses, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!” As was their custom when such situations arose, Moses and Aaron went to the tabernacle for instructions from God.

Moses was told to take the staff of God and gather the people before a rock. “Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water.” So when the people gathered, Moses said, “Listen you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” But instead of speaking to the rock, Moses struck it with the staff and water gushed out.

EXODUS

God rebuked Moses and Aaron: “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.” As a result of disobedience, neither Moses nor Aaron would later be permitted to enter the promised land when Israel finally crossed the Jordan.

Israel was then led by the cloud from their camp to the border of Edom. Denied passage, they were forced to make a detour and arrived at Mount Hor where Aaron died. Again people complained about food and water within hearing of the LORD, and again his anger was aroused. Once more his response to their discontent was severe.

“Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!” Then the LORD sent ven-omous snakes among them; they bit the people, and many Israelites died.

Numbers 21:5,6

On this occasion the Israelites realized they had sinned and they asked Moses to pray that God would remove the snakes. Moses prayed and God said to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole lifted in the air so anyone bitten by a snake could look at it and live (Numbers 21:8). Those looking at

the bronze snake recovered, foretelling Jesus lifted up on a cross so that those looking to him in faith might receive salvation, deliverance and healing.

During the years of wandering, those who refused to enter Canaan died and a new generation was born. God continued to protect them against foreign armies, but in Shittim the men indulged in sexual with Moabite women and even joined them in Baal worship. This stirred the LORD's anger and he sent a plague that killed 24,000 until Aaron's grandson drove his spear into a man sinning openly with a pagan woman.

After the plague, God ordered a census of men able to serve in the army. Joshua and Caleb were the only survivors besides Moses from a prior census at Sinai. Then before the high priest and all the people, Moses reviewed their history since the exodus from Egypt and he commissioned Joshua to lead Israel into the promised land.

Moses exhorted the people to fear the LORD and to be careful to obey his decrees: "Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, laws and decrees." And in particular. Moses stressed the danger of allowing pagans to remain: "You must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them" (Deuteronomy 7:2,3).

EXODUS

Moses stressed that God's continued favor depended on obedience to his laws. It was made very clear that rebellion would never be tolerated. They were to be a people devoted to the LORD who lived in complete separation from the heathens in the land.

“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse - the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn away from the way that I command you today by following other gods which you have not known.”

Deuteronomy 11:26-28

Moses then reminded Joshua that the LORD would be faithful to go before him and he encouraged Joshua to be courageous. After doing this, Moses left for Mount Nebo so he might look across at Canaan from the east side of the Jordan. Moses died on the mountain although his body was never found.

3. Lessons to be Learned

After receiving the law and commandments from God at Sinai, it was Israel's duty to fear God and obey his commands. In return, Israel would be set above all nations and blessed. But they seemed

to have little ability or even desire to practice what God ordered. It was almost as though they felt God had given them *suggestions* instead of commandments. And they never really learned to base their confidence in God on who he was instead of what he was doing for them at the moment.

By refusing to enter Canaan as God said, Israel failed to enter his rest. To enter his rest, the first condition is faith and the second is obedience. If either is lacking, rest can't be attained. We need to realize that Israel's failure wasn't weakness. It was failing to trust God's strength in their own weakness and entering Canaan by faith.

Today's greatest problem in the church is a mirror image of the same thing. God looks at our unbelief as showing contempt and accusing him of unfaithfulness. Faith and mountains simply cannot coexist. It's a principle that either the mountain or faith will disappear given time. Faith is for us to trust God even before the mountain begins moving.

Consecration at Mount Sinai turned out to be just a ritual instead of true surrender to the will of God. The same happens today if people say a sinner's prayer without repenting (2 Corinthians 7:10). We can have great sorrow over the consequences of our bad decisions and yet not have any sorrow whatsoever over offending God.

EXODUS

The Holy Spirit warns us to learn from the example of Israelite bones scattered over the desert floor lest we also find ourselves cut off from God (Romans 11:20-22). It's critical to search our hearts to see whether unbelief is present. Many seem to not understand that the only way to avoid wandering in the wilderness is to walk in steps Jesus chooses.

Otherwise we're adopting a gospel that is different than that given by Jesus and the apostles. God's patience was not endless for the Israelites, nor is it endless today! Man has been created to live in fellowship with his Creator. But if we claim to have this fellowship yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth" (1 John 1:6).

This was the folly of Israel. They presumed their relationship with God was secure while doing as they saw fit in their own eyes. It's like that with many who profess Christ. They keep one foot back in Egypt while trying to live in the promised land. But Jesus says serving two masters is not possible. And Israel learned this by yearning for Egypt.

So it is that Paul warns us, "If God did not spare the natural branches [i.e., Israel], he will not spare you either" (Romans 11:21). We're to glory in a cross that puts self to death and crucifies the world. Jesus never said, "Be a convert!" His command to us is, "Deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow me!" (Luke 9: 23).

But as Israel found itself disciplined, their hearts and behavior did not change. It's a pattern seen in the courts *and* church today. People want to be forgiven a high price for low living, but are not willing to change. As a dog returns to its vomit, we return to our folly (Proverbs 26:11). Confessing sin is only empty ritual apart from willingness to repent.

Paul compares it to physical circumcision without circumcision of the heart: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts" (1 Corinthians 7:19). We're deceived to think we won't reap what we sow. Seeds of sinful weeds never yield a harvest of righteous flowers, no matter what the intention.

The challenging of Moses' authority by the men following Korah is also familiar in the church. Many sit under teaching that exposes sin but hearts remain hard and they reject accountability. Others prefer teaching that presents grace as a tidal wave of mercy that washes over deliberate sin, ignoring the sternness of God (Romans 11:22). Those teaching that way are deceitful workmen who masquerade as apostles of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:13). They can be recognized by their fruit, the ungodly lives of those who listen to their teaching.

Wandering in the wilderness often results from cheap grace merchandised by many churches. A sign recently posted in our city read as follows:

“Free Trip to Heaven – Details Inside.” But Jesus never offers a cost-free salvation. He says we’re to count the cost before deciding to be a disciple (Luke 14:28-33). While the gospel comes as a free gift, we are no longer free to live as we please. Salvation requires us to enter a way ordained by God.

Surrender to God is very costly, but always yields rewards exceedingly greater than anything we’re asked give up. It’s refusing the gift of salvation or turning back to the ways of the world that costs the most in the long run! Scripture does not caution us about falling away were it not possible to do so (e.g., Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-29).

To claim it’s impossible to fall simply isn’t biblical. Unconditional eternal security scratches the ears of those itching for pleasantries. Israel also rebuked godly prophets, saying, “Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions...stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 30:10,11). Nothing really has changed for many in the church today!

Before the Israelites left Mount Sinai, God warned that he might be compelled to set his face against those he’d redeemed if they refused to obey his ways. We need to realize God hasn’t changed one iota when it comes to intentional disobedience against his will as revealed to us in the Word of God.

“If you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and...so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life.”

Leviticus 26:14-16

Complaining instead of submitting to God is as offensive today as when he sent the poisonous snakes to kill grumblers. Complaining in our trials says we don't trust God and is a terrible witness to unbelievers. And when people asked Moses to pray for God to remove the snakes, his prayer was not answered in that way.

The LORD left the snakes, representing trials we experience life. God's solution was the perfect answer. They needed to look at the bronze snake on a pole. It was a picture of Jesus on the cross at Calvary. He and he alone is the source of salvation, deliverance and healing. A lost need world needs to see our trust in Jesus during life's trials.

Others may consider us unstable if they see us rejoicing in a lion's den. But the world will not fail to take note that Christ gives joy and peace that passes human understanding. We'll never witness as Jesus desires if we insist traveling the easy road when God tells us trials are necessary for our faith to mature (James 1:2-4).

EXODUS

Although we don't live under law and must avoid legalism, many evangelicals distort the truth about grace. Grace is not excuse for disobedience, and God's moral law never changes. Grace teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions and makes it possible to live godly righteous lives (Titus 2:11,12; 2 Peter 1:3). A God of grace had a man stoned for gathering wood on a Sabbath. A God of grace also brought a new covenant through blood shed by our Passover Lamb Jesus. And he draws a distinction between unintentional sins and sins that deliberately defy the will of God. Warnings about consequences for intentional sin are identical under both the old and new covenants.

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who insulted the Spirit of grace?"

Hebrews 10: 26-29

This passage is in a context of God telling us to “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess” (Hebrews 10:23). Anyone sanctified by the blood of Jesus who willfully keeps on sinning after knowing the truth places himself at grave risk of judgment and raging fire...a picture of hell. This mirrors the Old Testament scriptures that warn, “anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD and that person must be cut off from his people” (Numbers 15:30).

All who teach must proclaim this without out compromise as did Ezekiel. God told Ezekiel to be a “watchman” and warn people of their evil ways (Ezekiel 3:17-19). Otherwise God said Ezekiel would be accountable for the blood of the wicked. Paul knew this warning when he said, “I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:26-27).

Wandering in the wilderness was never the intention of God for his treasured people. It was a result of their failure to trust God and exercise the obedience that comes from faith. Israel may have intended to live in godliness, but they failed to act on their intentions. As much as they desired God’s blessings, the obedience required by God was often deliberately ignored.

EXODUS

Like Israel, we can dismiss what God has done on our behalf and find ourselves wandering in the wilderness because of rebellion. God's desire is for us to live in victory despite every inclination to do as we see fit. He allows our rebellion only to a point before his wrath falls upon us (Ephesians 5:6). Proverbs 29:1 warns that those who remain stiff-necked after many rebukes are suddenly destroyed without further chance to repent.

When God says we'll reap what we sow, it isn't to be taken lightly. Perfection is not expected, but neither is intentional rejection of his revealed will tolerated. The principle "*if...then*" so evident in the story of the Exodus must be taken to heart. Jesus says only those who obey him are friends and he warns us that only those who obey will enter the kingdom of heaven. Did you know this or are you sitting under the teaching of false prophets?

Truth to Remember

A wilderness experience may appear similar to the desert, but has a quite different cause. The wilderness is the consequence of having a rebellious spirit. What father fails to discipline a child he loves? Discipline is a part of God's grace. Beware lest this gift be received in vain (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Part V

CANAAN

*When you go to war against your enemies
and see horses and chariots and an army greater
than yours, do not be afraid of them, because
the LORD your God who brought you up out of
Egypt will be with you. For the LORD your God is
the one who goes before you to fight for you
against your enemies to give you victory.*

Deuteronomy 20:1,4

Part V. *CANAAN*

1. Background

The time arrived for Israel to enter the land promised to their forefathers by God. The bones of those refusing to trust God at Kadesh lay scattered across the desert. Only a new generation of people would enter God's rest and have the opportunity to live under blessings promised them by a covenant-keeping God. But there remained one challenge for the Israelites. It was to be obedient to what they'd been told by Moses before he left for Mount Nebo to look across at the promised land

“I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed.”

Deuteronomy 30:15-18

The principle of “*if...then*” would continue to operate and one “*if*” was avoiding treaties with the heathens. They were reminded God insisted on destroying enemies, but many fail to understand this today. Many Christians continue to fellowship with unbelievers and others fail to purify their lives of besetting sin like addiction, greed and lust. The churches they attend usually compromise teachings that warn persistent disobedience to God will bring his wrath and eternal condemnation.

God was jealous for those he had redeemed and he wanted to shield them from the influence of those given over to idolatry. Lincoln said the way to destroy enemies was by making friends. It may be true in a worldly sense, but there’s great risk for believers to associate with unbelievers. God warns bad company corrupts good character (1 Corinthians 15:33). He doesn’t say bad company *might* corrupt. God says it *does* corrupt us!

God had endured backsliding by Israel, a picture of his mercy in not immediately forsaking those who stumble. But now accountability was at hand. He overlooked ignorance in the past but now people were commanded to drive out all heathens. Failure to obey would risk falling into ways God said were detestable. He warned sexual immorality and idolatry would result in spiritual death and lead to eternal condemnation.

A new chapter in the life of Israel was now beginning and it was full of promise. It was time to conquer enemies, a picture of overcoming strongholds in our lives that are obstacles to righteousness, peace and joy. With eager anticipation people readied to cross the Jordan even though the river was dangerously high at flood stage.

But when feet of priests who carried the ark touched the water, it stopped flowing and the river bed was dry. Like crossing the Red Sea, they had a miraculous God going before them and their faith was mountain-top high. However there were some conditions to be met for enjoying victorious life in the days ahead.

We can better understand the picture given us if we consider salvation as having one way, two sides, and three stages. The one way of course is Jesus: "I am the way..no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The two sides are faith and grace. Salvation comes by grace through the human response of faith in Christ.

"It is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). Salvation is by grace (undeserved favor earned by Jesus) if we repent and turn to God through faith in Christ alone based on his finished work at Calvary (Acts 3:19).

EXODUS

Salvation has three stages, the *past stage* when we pass from spiritual death into life through faith in Jesus' finished work and submitting to his lordship (Romans 10:9). The *present stage* is counting self dead to sin, allowing the Holy Spirit to do his sanctifying work (2 Thessalonians 2:13) in our lives and doing those good works that God prepared for us in advance (Ephesians 2:10; James 2:24).

The *future stage* includes deliverance from coming wrath (Romans 5:9) and receiving a glorified body (1 Corinthians 15:52) along with rewards waiting for us in heaven. Entering Canaan is not a picture of this future stage in heaven however. In fact, the promised land contained a number of enemies that needed to be overcome if Israel was going to live in victory.

The promised land is a type of the present stage of salvation, living not by the strength of man but through power that comes from yielding self to the Holy Spirit. Israel would overcome enemies as long as they submitted to God whose desire was to bless them and have them prosper.

However, they'd be required to stop doing things their own way and walk in the ways chosen by God. They were to keep hearts pure by resisting idolatry and putting to death fleshly misdeeds. The promised land represents a life that comes by being *in Christ* and living in *his* power.

Crossing the Jordan represents that filling with the Spirit that Jesus called baptism in the Holy Spirit. It requires a decision to be totally governed by God. In a sense it's an exchange of lives, dying to self so the life of Jesus can live in us. We see the picture of this illustrated by three events associated with Israel crossing the Jordan.

To prepare for crossing, there had to be a consecration of the people (Joshua 3:5). This points to a principle that in asking God to move mightily on our behalf, hearts be in accord with his will. And although the river was running at flood stage, God completely stopped the flow of water so they could cross. The river bed was even dry and they entered the promised land without hindrance.

So it is with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This filling with power doesn't take place until the heart is prepared by consecration to live in genuine submission to God. This condition for receiving baptism in the Spirit is often ignored. Many seek baptism without knowing there must be repentance of all known sin together with deep commitment.

The second event was circumcision and it took place right after crossing the Jordan. It was a ritual that qualified every Hebrew male to receive blessings under a covenant with God. Circumcision is a picture of putting flesh to death so that God's

power might be manifested instead of depending on human effort.

The third event that preceded moving ahead to conquer enemies was celebrating Passover. This feast reminded Israel that their deliverance from Egypt and preservation in the wilderness was only possible through the mercy and grace of God.

The same is true when believers celebrate the Lord's Supper and recall the finished work of Jesus at Calvary and are reminded we must depend on God for strength and protection to be over-comers against the world, the flesh and the devil.

2. Trials and Tests of Faith

The principal character as Israel entered the promised land is Joshua. He is a type of Jesus who leads us into the Spirit-filled life. As an assistant to Moses, Joshua showed great love and devotion to God by remaining for a long time in the presence of God at the tabernacle after Moses prayed (Exodus 33:11). He was also one of the two spies resisting a bad report to not enter Canaan and was chosen by God to replace Moses as the leader of Israel.

The first stronghold facing Israel after they were circumcised and celebrated the Passover was the fortress of Jericho. Joshua approached the city and encountered a man holding a drawn sword who

identified himself as commander of the LORD's army, thought by many to be an appearance of the pre-incarnate Jesus.

Joshua fell down in reverence and listened to words identical to those Moses heard in front of at the burning bush: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy" (Joshua 5:15). Joshua was then given the following instructions for the capture of Jericho::

"March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse." Joshua 6:2-5

Gold, silver and other valuables were to be placed in the LORD's treasury and none kept by the people lest it bring God's wrath upon Israel. So the army marched around Jericho as God ordered and trumpets were sounded on the seventh day. When the people shouted, the walls of the city collapsed as God promised. The Israelites entered and killed all living things as God had commanded: adults, children and animals alike.

However, an Israelite Achan took some of the things devoted to God and buried them in his tent. When Israel fought next, they were routed by the enemy. Joshua cried to the LORD who said the reason for defeat was presence of sin in the camp. It was learned Achan had taken things devoted to God and this man and his entire family were stoned to death at the command of God (Joshua 7:15).

Following this, God again went to battle on behalf of Israel and they were victorious over their enemies by his hand. The psalmist later wrote, “It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them” (Psalm 44:3). This is a powerful lesson that is ignored when we keep trying to do what can only be accomplished by God.

The Gibeonites heard of these victories and resorted to a ruse to protect themselves by pretending to have come from far away in search of peace. Joshua unfortunately made a treaty allowing them to remain in Israel’s midst, even though God said there were to be no treaties with heathens. Joshua failed to inquire of the LORD before making a treaty and it would cost Israel dearly in years to come.

Over time, Joshua led his army in a series of victories and God hardened the Canaanite hearts

against Israel so they'd be defeated. He didn't want his precious children corrupted by ways of wicked people. But after the seven Canaanite nations were defeated, Israel failed to drive out all their people. Eventually this would contribute to the undoing of the Israelites.

Once the enemy nations had been defeated, some Israelites rejoined families who had remained on the east side of the Jordan. The tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh decided to live east of the Jordan. The other tribes had agreed as long as the men of these three tribes helped to conquer Canaan. So once the land was secured, the men of these three tribes left the promised land to rejoin their families back across the Jordan.

When Joshua became advanced in years, he called together the leaders of Israel and urged them to obey all that was written in the Book of the Law. Once again Joshua stressed a need to avoid making treaties of any kind with pagans, including entering into marriage with unbelievers.

Joshua had a Hebrew name equivalent to Jesus in the Greek and was an OT type of Christ. He was a godly man through his entire life, and his final words to the people of Israel before he died were similar in dedication to God to those spoken by Jesus many centuries later:

EXODUS

“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

Joshua 24:14-15

Joshua had an abiding commitment to serve God, but most of the Israelites were double-minded and failed to recognize their deceitfulness as they said, “Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!” Joshua warned that God was jealous and would not tolerate rebellion: “If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you.” And this warning brought the same response. “No! We will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:21).

But shortly after Joshua and the elders who served with him died, Israel began serving the false gods of heathen neighbors. From that time forward until Jesus birth, the history of Israel was similar to that of many in the church today. They continued to associate with those who defied the ways of God and adopted their customs. Some of the Israelites even began to sacrifice their own children to false gods of the Canaanites.

Over the centuries, the LORD raised leaders who brought Israel back to repentance, but spiritual decline took place again. Eventually God used the neighboring nations as a rod of his judgment. Israel was taken into exile and Jerusalem left with walls broken down and the temple where worship and sacrifices were carried out totally destroyed.

Rebellious Israel reaped what it sowed by willful disobedience against God. While intentions may have been good, the old covenant of the law did not give the people the life and power to obey what was set before them in the law and commandments. So in time, God spoke through the prophets of need for a new covenant.

God said he would write his laws on men's hearts so they'd know his will, and said he'd have a personal relationship with all who called on him (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Under the new covenant, the Holy Spirit would give those redeemed divine power so they could follow God's decrees and keep the laws he set before them (2 Peter 1:3,4).

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” Ezekiel 36:26,27

EXODUS

These passages inspired by God foretell the baptism in the Holy Spirit by which people would receive divine power to escape corruption caused by their evil desires. Under the old covenant, only judges, prophets and a few kings were empowered. Under the new covenant, however, God promised to pour out his Spirit on all men (Joel 2:28). Power to live godly lives would then become available to all placing their faith in Jesus Christ.

God would work in believers to will and act according to his purposes. The power of the Holy Spirit would allow those with faith to do the same things Jesus did during his own ministry on earth (Mark 16:17, 18; John 14:12). On return to heaven, Jesus received the gift of the Holy Spirit so those having faith in him could be baptized with power. Peter explained this when the Spirit was first poured out at Pentecost.

“Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.” Acts 2:33

This baptism in the Holy Spirit is a work of grace separate and distinct from salvation (Acts 2:4; 8:14-17; 9:17; 19:6). It gives the power needed to be effective witnesses of God’s grace (Acts 1:8). Filled

with the Spirit, believers no longer must attempt to obey God by human effort. Divine power becomes manifested in human weakness so to *in Christ* can live blamelessly before God (1 Thessalonians 2:10).

The old covenant is known as a ministry of the law. And in recent decades, the new covenant has been called a ministry of grace, but this has confused matters. Godless men were already in the early church, changing God's grace into a license for immorality (Jude 4). The same is true today. It is totally contrary to Scripture when deliberate sin is excused rather than demanding repentance.

The apostle Paul refers to the new covenant as a "*ministry of the Spirit*" (2 Corinthians 3:7,8). This is preferable to describing the new covenant as that of grace in that it emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in our relationship with God. All provisions of grace come through the Holy Spirit who himself is called the "*Spirit of grace*" (Hebrews 10:29).

The Holy Spirit not only brings conviction of sin that leads to repentance (John 16:8). The Spirit imparts new life (John 3:5) and gives divine power to live in obedience to God's will (2 Peter 1:3). While it's grace that saves, true faith always finds itself expressed through obedience when faith is genuine (John 14:15; Romans 1:5). But the soft gospel so often preached does not emphasize this biblical truth.

3. Lessons to be Learned

The story of the Exodus illustrates so many principles about victorious living in Christ. That is the desire of God, for it is freedom that Christ has set us free and we're more than conquerors through him (Galatians 5:1; Romans 8:37). God did not deliver the Israelites out of Egypt to live in the wilderness, but rather in a land that represents a life of overcoming and victory.

We need to realize what God was telling Joshua on the road leading to Jericho when he said, "I have delivered Jericho into your hands" (Joshua 6: 2). The battle was already won from heaven's point of view. To enjoy victory, Israel only had to obey God's instructions. And this is true for us today. Victory has been won for us by Jesus through his vicarious death and resurrection.

God has a plan and a future for each one of us along with abundant blessings both in this life and eternally. That's his nature, to love and bless. But often we fail to enjoy the rights and privileges which belong to us as the children of God. We may not understand our rights or be taking advantage of what Christ has already accomplished for us. In some cases, we may be reaping consequences of not sowing to please the Spirit of God.

This story clearly illustrates the principle of “*if...then*” which says a man reaps what he sows, a principle also true under the new covenant. “*For of this* you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person...has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things, God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient (Ephesians 5:5,6). And again, Paul warns us:

“Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit will reap eternal life.”
Galatians 6:7,8

Some may have set this book aside, saying, “It’s legalism and living under law.” I’ve encountered such reactions more than once because people fail to accept God’s demand for holiness. We must not be deceived by false prophets about whom Jesus and the apostles warn will have increasing influence.

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars.” 1 Timothy 4:1,2

EXODUS

I've found myself forced to leave churches where the senior pastor was scratching the itching ears of people who preferred pleasant words rather than messages that convicted. Many experience the same thing across America. Prosperity is taught instead of purity; the wrath of God is ignored over sins he calls detestable such as sexual immorality, greed and drunkenness.

Israel was under grace on leaving Egypt, yet the majority were cut off from their inheritance due to rebellion (Isaiah 47:6; Romans 11:21,22). In the same way, cheap grace has produced multitudes who are professing Christ but live to please the sinful nature, unaware that they face destruction.

Jericho's walls were guaranteed to crumble, but it wasn't enough for the Israelites to cross the Jordan. They had to encircle the city and march by faith or its walls wouldn't have fallen. In the same way, our strongholds will not be destroyed unless we learn to walk in obedient faith.

God demanded Israel put pagans to death to illustrate a lesson for us: Separate from any who'd tempt us to return to the ways of Egypt (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). We cannot afford intimate association with unbelievers in marriage, business or leisure. As God warns, "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

No one factor has caused the ex-offenders I've known to fall back into old ways like refusing to separate from 'home boys' as God commands. To fellowship with unbelievers is so risky, even though breaking away from old friends (even the lukewarm Christian) can be painful. But God is earnest about wanting to protect those who belong to him.

If we refuse to obey, God will let us pursue our own ends and face the grim consequences. Old strongholds such as addiction, immorality, greed and the like can never be sanctified; they must either be destroyed or allowed to take over. Relapse is only a drink or hit on a crack pipe away, one porn movie for the sex addict, or one bet on a golf game for the gambler.

Part of the price to be paid when we turn to Jesus is to live as an alien and stranger in this world (1 Peter 2:11). A life of separation is the literal meaning of the word holiness...and without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). So avoiding fellow-ship with those likely to tempt a person is critical.

Achan's struggle with greed also contains a strong warning for today. God sees greed as idolatry and the worship of demons. Even Achan's children paid the ultimate price for his disobedience. Many sacrifice children to demons today by allowing them to be influenced by computer and TV trash, movies, and having the wrong type of friends.

God plans for more than just delivering us from Egypt. For far too long, Fundamentalists have been focusing solely on the idea of salvation being limited to forgiveness of sins and hope of eternity spent in heaven. But Jesus wants us to enter his rest and we're even told to be careful that we don't fall short of this rest (Hebrews 4:1).

So what's the rest of which Scripture speaks? It's coming to an end of striving in our own strength and realizing what it means to be seated with Christ in heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). It's letting God take our weakness and give us his strength, letting him take our poverty and give us his riches, letting him take our sickness and give us divine healing.

Living in God's rest is giving him failures of our miserable pasts and receiving a future filled with glorious hope. It's having God's power work in us and through us to bring salvation, healing, and free-dom from oppression to those in bondage, being so filled with the Holy Spirit that all efforts depending on human effort cease to exist.

Missionaries don't go where they think there is a need until sent by God who knows when people are ready to receive. Working for the Lord comes to an end and humble service begins. The rest of God is pressing forward only by the power of the Holy Spirit for advancement of the kingdom belonging to the King of kings.

The Reubenites, Gadites and half-tribe of Manasseh who remained east of the Jordan are an example of what happens when we fail to go all the way with God. By remaining across the Jordan, they are a picture of those who fail to persevere until they receive the empowering that comes by baptism in the Holy Spirit. And these tribes were the very first to turn from God and follow pagan ways.

Half-hearted devotion to Jesus always fails to endure in the long run. This is why Jesus makes it so abundantly clear that those who want to save their lives as they are will lose them, while those losing their lives for his sake will save them (Matthew 16:25). “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). This requirement is brushed aside by nose-counters who like to boast about how many are ‘saved’ by their preaching.

Not every hindrance to life in the promised land results from present circumstances. Our past can pose a considerable obstacle. In order to avoid being a prisoner of the past, we must resolve some old issues in certain instances. Steps eight and nine of *Twelve Steps* to recovery concern *making amends to those we’ve harmed and forgiving those who have hurt us*. There is no better way to get rid of guilt and shame over past mistakes than by asking forgiveness and making amends to those we’ve harmed when possible.

A huge handicap to joy and peace for many is deep-seated bitterness over having been abused physically, emotionally or sexually. It can result in serious bondage and prevent a person from receiving baptism in the Holy Spirit and entering into fullness of life pictured by the promised land.

Equally important is Jesus' warning: "If you do not forgive men their sins, your heavenly Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:15). Persistent anger and resentment can allow Satan to gain a foot-holds in our life and expose us to his flaming arrows of tormenting spirits (Ephesians 4:26,27).

Forgiving is not forgetting. It's choosing to live with the effect of another's sin and let him or her off the hook as Jesus did for us. To forgive sets a captive free...the captive being that person willing to forgive. But it doesn't mean permitting continued abuse to take place without repentance.

While Joshua lived, Israel's dependence on God remained constant and they enjoyed continued success. It illustrates the victorious life available to us when we're led by the Spirit of God and obey the tasks we're given. When building the tabernacle, no detail was left to man's discretion. Workers did only as God directed, using skill and anointing that came through the Holy Spirit. Only in that way could a sanctuary be built that was acceptable to the God of Israel (Exodus 25-31).

This is a picture of God building his church today with men and women who are temples of the Holy Spirit. The church's glory will never exist in human ability or genius. The only way for the body of Christ to be built acceptably is by obedience to God's will through power of the Holy Spirit.

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus said to disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). The Greek translated witnesses is *martus*, implying being a martyr by dying to self so Jesus can live his life within us. For this to happen, the Holy Spirit must be given permission to mold us.

We must place our confidence in Christ, not in ourselves, friends or family (Philippians 3:3). To be led by the Spirit is such a new way of living that we must think a new way that is called renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2). It's a process of putting off the old self, developing new attitudes, and putting on a new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24).

God wouldn't instruct us to do this were it not possible, but this process must be done the right way. God must work in us to will and act according to his purpose (Philippians 2:13). We must recognize the difference between *who we are* and *what we do*. Many confuse the two as I did for many years.

After coming to a personal relationship with Jesus, confusion continued for a time. My sense of worth in childhood was always based on performing. Later my identity involved being a doctor; it's how I answered questions as to who I was.

I continued to think acceptance by God was based on my performance. Only later did I realize that God accepted me based on what Jesus had done for me, not my own merit, and that it's in Christ that I live and move and have my being (Acts 17:28).

How liberating it was to finally appreciate I was a human being and not a human doing. It wasn't my responsibility to be busy doing things. Rather, it was my responsibility to allow God to do *in* me and *through* me as he saw fit. The only question has to do with how my responsibility was fulfilled. And the answer wasn't all that complicated

We become what God wants and then do as he desires by grace through faith, in the very same manner that we're saved in the first place. It is our responsibility to study and meditate on Scripture so that its living words can renew our minds.

As our thinking changes, it'll be reflected in our actions and behavior. We'll stop conforming to the ways of the world and doing what is so contrary to the will of God for our lives (Romans 12:2). As the old self is being put off and attitudes are made new,

a new self will gradually emerge, even to our own surprise at times. And if we stumble, it won't be the end of everything. God looks for obedience coming from heartfelt love and devotion to his Son, and is not demanding sinless perfection from anyone.

An important aspect of life in the promised land is learning to receive God's grace. We need to learn living that way by approaching the throne of grace with confidence for help in our times of need (Hebrews 4:16). God wants to pour grace into our lives, and we must learn to humbly ask.

This involves seeking the Lord in all of our decisions. Israel's treaty with the Gibeonites was a mistake because they did not inquire of the Lord. If we could be victorious without guidance by God, we'd take credit God deserves. To even try on our own what's only possible by grace is a sign of pride.

Life in the promised land isn't free of trials and battles. Strongholds must be overcome; enemy forces are always encountered. Just as the Pharaoh sent chariots and soldiers after the Hebrews, Satan makes every effort to recapture those he once held captive, at times with success. Demas deserted his ministry with Paul when the world lured him back (2 Timothy 4:10), and Paul turned both Alexander and Hymenaeus over to Satan that they might be taught not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:19,20).

We must remain alert to the deceptions and temptations of our adversary. Many deceive themselves with the belief that Christians are immune to attack by demonic spirits. They naively think that because true believers cannot be possessed by the devil, one need not be aware of his evil schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:11). Such is a very serious and potentially fatal error.

The devil can deceive, oppress and severe afflict the elect of God. This is why Jesus tells us to pray for God to deliver us from the evil one (Matthew 6:13). He doesn't say this because Satan is unable to attack believers. Nor does Paul urge us to dress in the armor of God because true believers are immune to satanic attack (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Peter commands us to be alert and to resist Satan who patrols earth with his host of evil spirits (1 Peter 5:8,9). Anyone can find himself under attack, but spiritual warfare is ignored in the great majority of churches, and many needlessly remain afflicted or under some kind of bondage like addiction.

Leaders are often opposed to a deliverance ministry, yet we have all the weapons needed to not only resist Satan but defeat his schemes. It is tragic that multitudes in the church continue to suffer from a variety of perverse nightmares, addictions fueled by deceiving spirits, and illnesses caused by spirits of infirmity.

We've seen immediate freedom through the rebuking of demonic spirits in all of these situations with persons sincerely committed to Jesus. Indeed, rebuking of demons is part of the authority Jesus places in his church. Sadly, however, faulty doctrine has not seen this authority utilized in the majority of evangelical churches today.

Because Israel failed to trust God, only two of approximately 600,000 men leaving Egypt ever entered the promised land. And our full inheritance in Christ escapes many today. Divorce is equally as frequent in the church as for those married at a city hall. The same is true for sexual immorality, alcohol and drug abuse, greed, pornography and many other besetting sins.

Reasons for not enjoying the fullness of life Jesus came to bring are primarily twofold: one is a lack of faith and the second is failure to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. The church in America lives far below victory purchased for it at Calvary because it lacks both faith and power from on high that comes from outpouring of the Spirit on its members.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit escapes a person who places confidence in his own flesh rather than submitting to control of his life by God. Many only reach the place of receiving this baptism when they come to their wit's end in trying to live

victoriously. We must somehow reach a place where we become genuinely willing to be emptied of self before we can truly be filled with the Holy Spirit and remain in that blessing.

The final three steps of the *Twelve Steps* to recovery concern life in the promised land by the power of the Holy Spirit. Step ten stresses keeping a humble attitude: *we promptly admit our faults and repent when we are wrong*. Step eleven is *seeking to know God more intimately, praying for knowledge of His will and the power to carry it out*. And Step twelve exerts us to *carry the message of good news to others*.

All three steps depend on being filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus says we can be his witnesses only by power that comes through baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Only by divine power can we continually abide in Christ, know his will, and then be able to carry it out by carrying the message of the gospel to others.

What do you hunger for? Wealth? Success? Worldly pleasures? Approval by others? Does anything or anyone keep you from seeking the kingdom of God first of all? Do you lack the power to keep free of self-indulgence, alcohol, drugs, greed, anger, pornography, lust, or the trap of co-dependency? If any of these apply to you, you have company!

But you don't need to remain there. If you still live in Egypt, you must call on the Lord. Just as he waited for Israel to call upon him, he wants us to realize our need for the Savior. God will never turn away from anyone with a broken spirit and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17).

Once out of Egypt, your *position* is seated with Jesus in heavenly realms. Then it's time for your *condition* to change and enjoy his plans and promises for your life. Just remember this involves a season of refining to prepare you for what God has ahead in life.

As God reveals his purposes for your life, don't give up if you stumble. It's necessary to cross the Jordan to enter your inheritance in the promised land. Persevere in asking and seeking and knocking until you've received the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:9-13). All that's needed is to repent of all known sin and be willing to surrender control of your life to God.

Through divine power, a victorious life can be yours. Jesus wants you to experience the fullness of his grace. Don't repeat the mistake of three tribes that remained on the east side of the Jordan instead of following the cloud all the way. For one thing is absolutely certain. Once in the promised land, you'll never be satisfied again with life back on the other side of the Jordan.

EXODUS

Truth to Remember

When we fail to live in righteousness, peace and joy that is the kingdom of God, it's not because of lack on God's part. We failed to consecrate ourselves enough after leaving Egypt to receive power that comes through baptism in the Holy Spirit. Jesus will be faithful to baptize with the Spirit once hearts are prepared and we persevere in prayer to receive God's promised gift.

Epilogue

Leaving Egypt is one thing and living in the promised land something else. While it's critical to make converts (helping people leave Egypt), the charge given us by Jesus is to make disciples (i.e., living in the promised land). The gospel thrust is not simply to *believe*, but how the redeemed must *behave*.

“Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**”

Matthew 28:19,20 [emphasis added]

The Greek root for the word *disciples* is also that for *discipline*, and discipline is never learned by the wave of a magic wand. It's by grace through the Holy Spirit that one learns to deny self, take up crosses daily, and separate from the ungodly ways that characterize our present day society.

Change in behavior should be seen in all who profess Christ. It's corruption of the gospel to view grace as a frosting of mercy that covers a lifetime of *unrepented* disobedience to the will of God. The

grace of God that brings salvation teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions and live self-controlled, upright and godly lives (Titus 2:11,12).

As a new volunteer at the Pinellas County Jail years ago, I heard a newly ordained chaplain lead a group of men through the so-called *sinner’s prayer*. I was shocked when he told them that they were eternally saved even if they continued doing things that led to their incarceration.

This misguided man had sat at the feet of teachers who plagued the early church by claiming holy living was unnecessary for salvation. He was deceived by the idea salvation is a one-time event rather than a lifestyle. Paul knew the difference by saying he was a “*follower of the Way*” (Acts 24:14).

The Greek *hodos* translated as *Way* means a road that one walks. The Exodus story illustrates this, showing there’s more to being saved than just escaping Egypt. A few years back, I wrote a hymn, the words to which became a prayer...and my prayer for each reader of this book. Let us seek the grace to live as those who genuinely belong to the Good Shepherd. For he says, “My sheep listen to my voice ...and they follow me” (John 10:27).

JESUS, I WOULD WALK TODAY

Jesus, I would walk today,
in Your steps along the Way;
may Your Spirit be my guide
like a shepherd at my side.
Help me speak with love and care
to the needy in despair;
and when danger comes along,
let Your praises be my song.

Jesus, it's my prayer today
that I'll do just what You say;
when you say "Take up a cross,"
let me never mind the cost.
Give me strength to follow Thee,
thro the desert, 'cross the sea.
Help me do what's pure and right,
and for others be a light.

Jesus, I would sing Your praise,
and my hands in worship raise;
let Your fire my flesh consume,
so in me Your fruit can bloom.
Soon You'll come to claim a bride,
those becoming sanctified;
'til then I would walk each day
in Your steps along the Way.

Ralph E. Johnson, 1992

It's one thing to be delivered from Egypt through faith in Jesus Christ. Living in the promised land is something else. The story of the Exodus contains a number of lessons about this and Paul tells us what took place is written down so we might avoid the mistakes of Israel. They had a promise of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, and it's unwise to claim the blessings while ignoring the warnings as did Israel. So be very alert, especially if you're afflicted with either addiction or co-dependency. These not only keep many from ever entering the promised land. They can open a door for return to bondage in Egypt.

Do not be ignorant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God; sternness to those who fell, but kindness...provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. Romans 11:20-22