

FROM EGYPT



TO THE PROMISED LAND

Charles Faupel

From Egypt to the Promised Land
by Charles Faupel

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This publication has been dedicated to the public domain.

Translation Note

All quotations from scripture are taken from the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise specifically noted.

Acknowledgments

This book is the product of extensive time spent listening intently to those things which the Spirit of God has borne witness to my heart. Some of this has been a word spoken into my spirit, or more often, a resonance within my spirit as I would write. Much of what is written here comes out of the processing of precious conversations with brothers and sisters in Christ. I am especially indebted to Loren Caudill for many hours of patient listening and thoughtful response to many impassioned ideas that must surely have given him pause. Most of these conversations took place on the phone while he was in the driver's seat of an eighteen wheeler. We both learned that God's people can assemble anywhere!

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INTRODUCTION: A PEOPLE ON A JOURNEY

This is a book about God’s people on a journey; a journey that He has set out for them from the foundations of the world. I didn’t know that it was going to be a book about this journey when I first sat down to write. In fact, I didn’t even know that it was going to be a book at all. All that I knew at the time that I first began to write is that I had been going through a wilderness period for many years. I was prompted to write about that wilderness as I saw much that I could identify with *spiritually* in the wilderness wanderings of the Old Testament Israelites. This turned out to be an incredibly profitable experience for me, as God revealed even more spiritual truths in the experience of these ancient wanderers as I wrote. As I was bringing the writing of that experience to a close, I knew that there was more—about going in to the Promised Land. I tried to write it, but I could not. Words were put on paper, but there was no anointing or inspiration. I sensed the Lord telling me that it was not time yet. I took that to mean that I could not write about the Promised Land experience until I was fully positioned in the Promised Land myself. And I believed that meant that I would have “arrived:” that I would have learned to be victorious over all of the enemies that assailed me, especially that enemy within, over which I could not seem to get the upper hand. So I laid down my writing for about a year.

One day, as I was struggling over the cares of life that seemed to be having their way with me at the time, a small prompting within directed me to start writing about entering the Promised Land. I objected. “I have not arrived there yet. How in the world can I write about it now? As far as I can tell, I haven’t moved an inch from when I had to lay down the pen!” The voice was not deterred. Start writing again. As I began to write, I realized that, indeed, I was right—I hadn’t changed much in the intervening months. But I now understood that as I wrote, God was going to begin taking me through that which I was writing. How true this was. I have only begun to now walk in the realities of those truths that lay hidden in the physical journey of these spiritual ancestors of ours. In this way, this book is really a spiritual roadmap for me personally, as what I am writing here are truths that I recognize to be spiritual realities in store for me, but realities that remain to be worked deeply within me.

That article led to two additional articles: one on *possessing* the Promised Land, and the other on *living in* the Promised Land. Those four articles—*The Wilderness, Entering the Promised Land, Possessing the Promised Land, and Living in the Promised Land*—in revised form comprise the primary body of this book,

along with a companion chapter, *Life in Our Promised Land*, which unpacks some of the specifics that we encounter as part of the life of the Kingdom of Heaven in our day.

This book is about a journey that I—and you—are on, if you are being faithful to Him Who has called you. The specifics of this journey are different for each one of us, but the spiritual realities will be recognized by all. We begin in spiritual Egypt. Egypt for some of us may be a hedonistic lifestyle of drug use, crime, or self-absorbed materialism. Others may have been caught up in any of a myriad of dead end humanistic philosophies. Most of you were, or maybe still are, heavily steeped in any of the more than 40,000 religious denominations that make up what is erroneously called the Christian church. For some, you have discovered that you are in Egypt even within the church that you still attend. You may be hearing a call to leave and wondering if this could possibly be God. Others have already left to be tested further and will wander some more. Regardless of the specific nature or location of *your* “Egypt,” you have been called out of that place. You have been called to a journey of faith that will require different types of wilderness wanderings before you reach the land of destiny that God has for you. Moreover, during your time of captivity in Egypt, you took in and came to believe many things which God must purge from you. Not only must you come out of Egypt, but Egypt must come out of you! This is one of the purposes of the wilderness. Then, coming into view, is the land of promise! Contrary to what most of us have been taught, however, when you spy out the Promised Land (possibly by talking to others who have ventured on this journey before you), you discover that Canaan’s land is not some place of bliss to which we go after we die. You discover that it is indeed a place of destiny that God has prepared for us, but one that must be *conquered*. There are enemies in this land of Canaan! However, God has promised to go before us and overcome them as we remain faithful to Him.

I remember as a young child, when traveling any distance with my family, I would follow our journey on the map by drawing a line along the route as we traveled. As we would come into a town or city, I would mark that city with an “x,” and so it would go throughout our journey. Today, modern GPS systems track our location on a virtual map, so it is not necessary to do this—which of course takes the fun out of it! And so, I invite you to explore with me a roadmap depicting some of the highlights along the way. What follows is a “spiritual” roadmap of the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. While your experiences may not correspond to the circumstances described in the details of this book, I am confident that you will recognize the major landmarks and contours nonetheless. I am sure that I

only see in part and you have experienced much that I never will. I would love to hear about *your* journey and hope you may be inspired to write it down to share with others as we, together, negotiate this spiritual terrain. After all, we are living epistles to be read by men.

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CHAPTER 1: LIFE IN EGYPT

We begin the story of our journey in spiritual Egypt. We must understand that biblical Egypt is a *type* of our own spiritual journey. In this chapter, we explore the experience of the ancient Israelites in *their* Egypt, as it is very revealing for where it is that *we* have journeyed from. Let us listen very carefully to the Holy Spirit within us as we walk through this journey of our spiritual ancestors.

Israel's Egyptian Bondage

Egypt was the center of civilization at the time of Israel's 400-year captivity there. It was abounding in agriculture that grew abundantly in the rich soil of the Nile. Egypt was also a cultural center, known for its art and architecture. The pyramids of Egypt still cast their shadow today, and one—the Great Pyramid of Giza—still stands as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. These great pyramids were, in all likelihood, part of the physical landscape when the Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt.

Life in Egypt was, at first, quite good for the Hebrew people. You will remember that they voluntarily came to Egypt during the time of a famine in the land of Canaan. Jacob's family (now Israel) moved to Egypt to avoid the famine. This happened because Joseph, the youngest brother whom they had sold into slavery some years earlier, had risen to a place of great prominence in Pharaoh's court. Joseph's brothers, of course, did not know of their brother's ascendancy in Egypt when they first came to that land seeking food. Indeed, they did not even recognize him. We know the story of how Joseph deceived them into believing that they had stolen his silver cup, thereby luring them back to Egypt at which point he revealed his identity to them. His is an amazing story of God's faithfulness; and indeed of God's absolute creative genius in His resolve to bring to pass the destiny that He has established for each of us before the foundation of the world!

Life was good in Egypt, so long as Joseph and the Pharaoh under which he served were living. Joseph instructed his family to tell the Pharaoh that they were shepherds so that the Pharaoh would allow them to live in the fertile land of Goshen with relatively free reign. (Genesis 46:34)¹ They lived as full citizens of

¹ The Hebrew word for cattle in this passage is *miqneh*, which is a generic term for livestock. It was generally known that the Egyptians despised keepers of livestock, especially shepherds. One would wonder why the

Egypt. Even during the years of famine in Egypt, they were provided for, as Joseph wisely stored food in the years before the famine struck. Their favored position in Egypt began to change, however, with the Pharaoh that would follow. Joseph was no longer living, and this Pharaoh was not favorably inclined toward the Hebrews. He took note of the great number of Israelites in his land, and how their population was growing rapidly. He set taskmasters over them, and they essentially became slaves to him through these taskmasters. The scriptural account indicates that this enslavement resulted in only increasing their numbers (Exodus 1: 8-12). The Hebrew people were becoming acclimated to their slavery, and seemingly even thriving! This was not sitting well with the Pharaoh. Knowing that the Hebrews were a patriarchal people, he instructed the midwives to kill any male child who was born to Hebrew women, thereby attempting to render them impotent, and presumably to eventually decimate them as a people.² The midwives were God-fearing women, however, and refused to obey the orders, lying to the Pharaoh by telling him that the Hebrew women delivered their babies so quickly that they were born before they even had a chance to come into their chambers! Oh my, there is indeed a place for divine deception in God's great Kingdom agenda for his people! God, in His divine sovereignty was perpetrating this deception through these Godly women in order to protect the future deliverer of His people. Paul says, "we are deceivers, yet true" (II Corinthians 6:8).

It would be many years, of course, until God's people were delivered from their slavery in Egypt. Moses would be raised up in the Pharaoh's court, again under the deceptive guise that he was the son of the Pharaoh's daughter. The Lord God even arranged for Moses' birth mother to raise him as a midwife. God was at work, accomplishing His divine purpose in a most creative way. Somehow, as he was growing in stature, Moses knew in his heart that he was one of the Hebrews. This knowing was manifest when he came upon an Egyptian pummeling one of the Hebrews. A holy anger arose within him and he killed this Egyptian attacker. When he learned that this act of homicide had been observed by the Hebrews in a later incident, Moses feared for his life because he knew that murderous act

Pharaoh would be inclined to give them the land of Goshen, prime land in Egypt, if sheep herders were so detested. One hypothesis is that the Egyptians were ruled at that time by an invading foreign dynasty, known as the Hyksos dynasty, who were themselves shepherds. Their occupational affinity with the Israelites, combined with the fact that they were regarded as an enemy, foreign occupier, might explain why this particular Pharaoh would be inclined to grant this lush land of Goshen to the Israelites (Starling, 2009). It would also explain why the Pharaohs that came after him were so brutal with the Egyptians.

² Presumably, with no males in their population, young Hebrew women would then be forced to intermarry with Egyptian men, thereby amalgamating them with the Egyptians, compromising them as a distinctive people, thereby eliminating or greatly reducing the threat that they posed.

would eventually be reported, and he probably knew that his “Hebrew roots” would be revealed.

So he left the courts of the Pharaoh and fled into the desert. Moses had no way of knowing it then, but he would remain in the desert for 40 years before he returned to Egypt. While there, he took a wife and settled into the desert culture and lifestyle. God was doing a deep work in Moses during this long wilderness sojourn, purging him of all of the nobility and self-importance in which he walked in Pharaoh’s courts. He was truly humbled during this time, as God was preparing him. This all led to the climax of the story of what might arguably be considered the greatest deliverance ministry in the history of mankind. In fact, the Exodus account states that it was God who hardened the heart of the Pharaoh. God did this so that the children of Israel could witness His mighty power to deliver them.

In the meantime, the Pharaoh was increasing the burden on the Hebrew people. They were under great stress, and it seemed as though their God had abandoned them. God had *not* abandoned them, however; He saw their distress and He heard their cries. Moses was now ready for his divine appointment, and the Lord let him know in a most remarkable way—by talking to him out of a burning bush! We know this remarkable story well. God demonstrated to Moses that it was *His* power that would deliver the people of Israel. Moses was merely the vessel that God would use. He resisted at first, but eventually complied when the Lord agreed that Moses could take his brother Aaron as his mouthpiece, now having been fully purged of any sense of ability to accomplish this task. How well we know the Pharaoh’s reaction. It was, at first, one of mockery as he only increased the brick-making demands upon the Hebrew children—demands that were physically impossible to meet. These Israelites could not believe what was happening to them, and even began to blame Moses. With each of the increasingly devastating plagues, however, the Pharaoh became sobered. He finally agreed to let the Israelites go to worship the Lord, but then recanted. This happened more than once. Finally, the Lord delivered the final blow, killing the oldest son in each of the families of the Egyptians. This was the occasion for the Passover, when, upon seeing the blood over the doorposts of the households of His people, the Lord would pass over that household and not bring death to the firstborn of Israel. The Passover is such an important event that God uses this to mark the beginning of the Hebrew calendar! This is the plague that finally penetrated the heart of Pharaoh, and he agreed to let the Hebrew children go. That very night, the Pharaoh summoned Moses and told him to leave with all of the Israelites. Estimates are that over one million people gathered up their belongings (in addition to necessary belongings that some of their fellow

Egyptians donated to them) and left Egypt that night. Pharaoh would change his mind again, and pursue the Israelites with his best men and horses, despite all of the devastation that his hardened heart brought upon his people. God was faithful, of course, drowning his entire army in the Red Sea. What a picture this is of the dreadful consequences of hardening our hearts to the Spirit of God!

The good news, friend, is that God was and always will be bigger than the Pharaoh!

Egypt: The Land of Our Bondage

Despite the unique nature of our backgrounds and experiences, we were all born into this world with the nature of our original progenitor, Adam. This nature has led some of us to pursue worldly gain at all costs. Others of us have pursued hedonistic pleasures, whether in the form of drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling or any of a myriad of other vices. Still others, have been committed to a disciplined lifestyle, vainly attempting moralistic perfection, placing a great deal of importance upon appearing righteous in the eyes of others. No matter what old Adam looks like, we have all been a slave to that carnal minded pharaoh. Regardless of our lifestyle, Egypt has been a very comfortable place for much of our time there. Those of us who pursued the materialistic lifestyle had our good jobs, 3-car garages, vacation homes, and all the accoutrements that go with life in Egypt. Why would we want to leave? Those of us taking the hedonistic route became addicted to the altered consciousness of drugs, alcohol or sex that allowed us to ignore the inner hurts and offenses that drove us there in the first place. And those among us who were so mistaken as to assume that we could pursue moral perfection through all manner of valiant self-effort did, indeed, experience the respect of our "Christian brethren" as long as we managed to toe the line and never cross their rules or expectations. Life was good. We didn't even know that we were in bondage! But God's mercy and love reaches even further into our depravity. He makes our circumstances just miserable enough to give us the incentive to leave Egypt. So He causes a wrinkle in our otherwise smooth lives--perhaps financial distress or a health issue. Egypt still looks pretty good. In fact, that is all that we know, so we labor all the harder, trying to maintain the lifestyle we have become accustomed to. Life on the hamster wheel intensifies as we labor feverishly making our version of bricks. We are at the mercy of the slave masters/pharaohs in our lives, and not even aware of our need for deliverance. We are very much like the children of Israel who, despite the hard labor, were not conscious that there was an alternative to Egypt. It took a

deliverer to confront the Pharaoh and to demand that he let the Hebrew people go, and it will take a deliverer for us as well.

Most of you reading this short book—especially those of you who were in the clutches of a materialistic and hedonistic lifestyle--found an escape from *this* Egypt when you came into a genuine relationship with Jesus, the *second* Adam. It is quite likely that you came into this relationship in the context of an organized church setting; or found yourself within such a setting shortly after your encounter with Christ.

My experience is probably quite typical of that of many of you. I was raised in a very conservative Pentecostal church. I tried to be good, but found myself forever falling short of the perfection that I knew was required. The bricks were just too heavy. Consequently, I began to doubt whether such perfection was possible. As a result, I began to doubt the very foundations of my faith. While attending Asbury College—a very conservative liberal arts college—I openly acknowledged that I was an agnostic. All the while I was struggling with personal issues that left me enslaved to hedonistic desires and temptations that would eventually put my marriage and even my career at risk. I remained in the church system throughout this time, but increasingly gravitated toward much more liberal, social gospel-oriented congregations. And so I got on *that* hamster wheel. I became involved in every social outreach program that I could get my hands on, all the while receiving accolades from my liberal fellow church parishioners. I could never do enough to bring peace to my troubled soul. My personal struggles continued. At one point, the oppressiveness of my lifestyle choices became more than I could bear, and I told the Lord—in the privacy of my own home very late one night—that I could no longer do this, and that I was ready to do things His way now no matter what that meant, even though He had to know: “it scared the shit out of me!” (Yes, those were my exact words to Him...) He met me that night in a most spectacular way. I have never been the same man since. I must say from where I sit now, however, that I have discovered, at least in part, what it would mean to do things His way, and the language that I used in the privacy of my home that night was not nearly strong enough to characterize the costly reality that would come. It would cost me everything! IT WILL COST YOU EVERYTHING. Yes, your bowels will be straightened, but this is just the beginning of the purging process. This journey is NOT for the faint of heart!

So, necessary for endurance in the wilderness to come, God granted me this deep and profound bonding encounter with Christ. I then began attending a much more conservative “Bible-believing” church. This was the only thing that I knew

to do because, after all, the Bible exhorts us to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together with other believers (Hebrews 10:25). In my understanding at the time, this verse could only mean that I needed to be “in church” every time the doors were open if at all possible. And so it was that I became deeply involved in institutional Christianity, this time in the more conservative genre, much more similar to that in which I grew up. I worked myself up the ranks from a lowly parishioner, to choir member, to deacon, and finally promoted to an elder, the highest lay position that one could hold in the denomination of which I was a part. I truly did love this church, and I did grow spiritually during my time there. My fellow parishioners, and in particular the elders with whom I served were some of the most spiritually mature individuals I had ever known to that time. They were, indeed, more spiritually mature than those in the Pentecostal church in which I had grown up.

There came a time, however, when the Lord called me out of that church. I did not know until several months later that He was calling me out of organized Christianity altogether. I was also not aware at the time that I had merely replaced one form of Egypt with another. The initial freedom that I experienced after my total surrender on the couch that night, was gradually replaced with other demands upon me that I mistakenly believed were demands of God Himself. Indeed, while the people of this congregation had a love for the Lord beyond what I had encountered before, they, too, were caught up in the demands of institutional Christianity that imposed tremendous burdens on them, just as was happening to me. As I discuss more fully below, these are demands inherent in any organized system, including the organized church system. God had something far more glorious for me, as He does for each of you. I obeyed God’s call, painful as it was at the time, and left this church and parted ways with these people that I loved so much. This would be my final *exodus* from this Egypt, and my crossing of the Red Sea into what would be several years of wilderness wanderings.

Egypt or Babylon?

We frequently hear the organized church, and the institutional structure surrounding it, referred to as “Babylon.” Those of us who have come out of the denominational—or non-denominational—church system frequently talk about “our time in Babylon,” or “our years of Babylonian captivity.” Babylon was, of course, a place of captivity in which the ancient Israelites were forced into exile nearly a thousand years after they entered the Promised Land following their exodus from Egypt. Because Babylon of old was a place of exile and captivity for

the Israelites, it has come to represent the oppressiveness that many of us re-live as we reflect back on our involvement in the modern-day church system.

Egypt, by contrast, typically symbolizes that time in our lives when we were “in the world.” We even refer to the “fleshpots of Egypt” to describe a pre-Christ hedonistic lifestyle that cared not for things religious, let alone spiritual. This idiom came about, of course, because of loose sexuality and loose morals generally that were allegedly rampant in certain sectors of Egyptian society at the time the Israelites were living in that captive land.

I regard the two metaphors, Babylon and Egypt, as but two symbols of the same reality. Both were places of captivity for the Israelite nation. Both were, at times, extremely oppressive regimes that placed great burdens on the Hebrew people. And, as I discuss below, our experience under the demanding pharaohs of church systems is no less enslaving than the addiction to worldly lifestyles. Despite their enslavement and alien status in both places of captivity, however, the Israelites grew very comfortable with their surroundings there. Most would have been very satisfied to stay in these oppressive regimes, in large part because there was no collective memory of life in Canaan or Judah. And so it was in *both cases* that it took the lone voices of a Moses or an Aaron, of a Daniel or a Nehemiah to call forth the delivery of God’s people from their oppressors. It was hardly a popular uprising that was the driving force behind the setting of the captives free from either of these oppressive situations!

The drama that sets the stage for this book begins in Egypt, and so Egypt is the metaphor for all of the various forms of captivity that we all found ourselves in before the “...law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus...[set us] ...free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2). I recognize that there may be some of you reading this book who were thrust directly from a secular hedonistic lifestyle into the wilderness of God’s purging, without spending any time in the halls of organized religion. The Egypt of your captivity was the bondage of your self-indulgence, feeding an appetite that could never be satiated—whether that appetite was for alcohol, drugs, sex, money, power, popularity, or community reputation—and you have not known the bondage of organized religion. Praise God! Most of you, however, have spent years in another form of Egypt, that being part of institutionalized Christianity. The Egypt described throughout the rest of this chapter is that experience that so many of us have had in the organizational milieu (religious beauracracy) that has erroneously been called “the church.”

Churchianity: Our Egyptian Captivity

The parallels are many between Israel's Egyptian captivity, and the experience of most of us in institutional Christianity—that which some have referred to as “churchianity”— if we have but eyes to see. In this section we will examine the various ways that the experience of our Hebrew ancestors is a type of the spiritual realities confronted by most of us reading this article during our sojourn in organized religion/Christianity.

Our Sojourn into Egypt

Like the experience of our ancient ancestors, our time in Egypt was voluntary, in the sense that none of us were forced at gunpoint or taken in shackles to be part of this institution. Some of you who did not grow up in any organized church context, came voluntarily as aliens into this Egyptian colony at some point after you had an encounter with Christ. You were hungry just as were the children of Israel when they sojourned to Egypt. Indeed, you found food there for your famished soul. You are among the “first generation” who sojourned into this foreign land, much like Jacob and his children and grandchildren who journeyed down to Egypt during the famine in Canaan. Many, if not most of us are second or third (or later) generations in this land of Egypt. Much like succeeding generations of Hebrews of old who were born into Egyptian captivity, we have never known anything other than the organized church system. We grew up attending a local church with our parents. Oh yes, there were many times we kicked and screamed against our parents efforts to get us out to church meetings each week, but we knew that this was part of our family's weekly routine and we ultimately complied. We were acclimated to it, and we had no awareness that there was even a credible alternative for an expression of authentic faith. Many of us chose to abandon this weekly ritual when we reached sufficient age, either upon leaving the home of our parents or at such time when they respected our right to make this decision for ourselves. Those of us who chose to leave the organized church quite likely abandoned our faith altogether because, in the consciousness that was so efficiently honed by that system, to leave that organization (erroneously) called the church is to reject a lifestyle of faith. Still others of you chose to continue the weekly ritual well into your adult years. Indeed, there are untold millions of people throughout the world, even into their eighties, nineties and beyond, who are still attending the same church organizations in the same communities in which they grew up! Whatever your specific introduction to organized Christianity, your entry into this institutional labyrinth came about in much the same way, and with many of the same motives,

that characterized the long 400-year sojourn of first and later generations of Hebrews in the Egypt of old.

Moreover, like our Hebrew ancestors, we lived off the fat of that land, and found it to be a land of plenty for a season. Coming from a place of spiritual famine, first generation sojourners devoured every morsel that was carefully prepared for us. We encountered truths that we had never heard before and we experienced fullness in our spiritual bellies that we had not known in the famine-stricken Canaan from which we came. Beyond this, many of us were lauded over as newcomers and made to feel wanted, invited to live in the “land of Goshen.” We reveled in the fact that we finally found a place where we belonged. The social activity was much more wholesome than that which we found in the world before discovering this wonderful land of churchianity. If we were there for any length of time, and played by the rules, we were eventually given positions of authority—teaching Sunday school classes, given charge of the nursery, serving as deacons and elders, being asked to sing in the choir. Oh, there were so many jobs that needed to be done, and we were more than happy to do our part as it made us feel so needed, and even important. All of this fed our egos, all the while we are being told that we were serving and building the Kingdom of God.

Second- and later-generation sojourners—those born into this system of doctrine and ritual—surely had a different experience. We took the truths preached from the pulpits and taught from the Sunday school lecterns for granted. We had never known anything else. These were not fresh truths to us, as they were to our first generation counterparts. Nevertheless, we were “comfortable” because we had grown up with these doctrines. Moreover, unlike our first-generation fellow parishioners, our involvement in the religious systems of man was not costly to us in any way. We did not have to abandon any old beliefs to function well in this system as did our first-generation comrades. Indeed, in some cases our first-generation counterparts paid a price of losing or straining personal relationships because their prior social peers were of a worldly crowd. They had “gone of their rockers and gotten religion” and their friends no longer found their company desirable. Possibly this is why converts to a religious system are often more zealous for “the faith” than their second-generation counterparts.³ I might even go so far as to say, these people are especially well prepared for the journey

³ Many years ago I conducted research among the student body at a Pentecostal liberal arts college regarding their level of commitment to the tenets of their Pentecostal faith. I found that first-generation Pentecostals who had suffered the loss of several friends as a result of their conversion to Pentecostal faith were much more highly committed, both behaviorally and attitudinally, to the beliefs and expectations of the Pentecostal tradition than were those students who grew up in Pentecostalism, or than converts who did not have to pay the price of lost friendships (Faupel, 1977)

ahead and I envy them. They have been schooled in how to count all things as loss. This is a critical lesson for those who choose to be faithful to Christ, even at a cost of abandonment by the very church system that had been such a source of belonging and comfort after having left their more worldly lifestyles behind.

Our Egypt Becomes Oppressive

Our initial experience of living off the fat of Goshen in the church system does not last indefinitely. Whereas at one time we found it gratifying and even honored to be asked to teach a Sunday school class or to serve on committees, it now begins to feel burdensome. We find ourselves engaging in all of the activities in our local assembly because others are expecting us to, not because this is the deep desire of our hearts. Like the Hebrews of old, we initially take these burdens in stride. "After all," we reason, "this is just part of the cost of being part of the body of Christ." So we obediently take on the duties and expectations that are placed upon us.

There is perhaps no expectation more strictly imposed upon church members than is tithing, or at least giving "freely" to the coffers of the church. The organized church has honed its "stewardship pitch" so shrewdly that it would make a used car salesman blush. I will never forget the last stewardship Sunday of a particular church I was attending, because it was the last straw that resulted in my leaving that particular assembly. The session of this particular congregation, some of the best business heads in town, had determined that they were not going to commit to a budget until all of the pledge cards had been turned in. Even in my spiritually bankrupt condition at the time, I wondered, "Where is the faith in this? Shouldn't they be seeking the Lord about what *He* is wanting them to do, formulate their budget around that directive, and then trust the Lord to bring in the funds to accomplish His mission?" When I voiced this, people examined me to see if I had a screw loose somewhere. In protest, I decided not to turn in my pledge card. I was so glad when the last Sunday of stewardship season came so that I would not have to hear any more stewardship sermons. What I heard that Sunday was nothing short of a threat: anyone who did not turn in their stewardship cards could expect a visit from one of the session members. I did *not* turn my card in! Less than three hours later, just as promised, I heard a knock on my door. It was a session member all right, but it was none other than the man who had originally hired me several years earlier! He was not my boss at the time, but talk about high pressure tactics! I was ready to play hardball with him. I asked him to sit down on my couch because I had some things to say. I launched into a passionate defense of why I refused to turn in my

pledge card, quite eloquent in my humble opinion, and let him know in no uncertain terms that I would not be turning in a pledge this year. He listened without saying a word. After I finished my diatribe he responded with what I know now to be nothing more than genteel southern charm, though at the time I flattered myself into believing it was utmost sincerity: “Chuck, I have never heard that argument articulated so powerfully. We need more people in this church as thoughtful and passionate as you.” The bait was cast, and I smiled smugly. He then pulled out the pledge card: “Now, do you think you are ready to sign the card now so that I can take it with me, or would you like to pray about it for a couple of days?” I was absolutely flabbergasted. This is almost certainly an extreme experience, but I hope that it conveys the burdensome yoke that the organizational system that we call “the church” places upon those who are enslaved to it.

The reason for this burdensome yoke of slavery is that this organization is, above all else, a *bureaucracy*. Bureaucracies are, by their very nature, designed to produce the greatest output in the most efficient way possible. This is true, whether the bureaucracy in question is an automobile factory, a McDonalds restaurant, Walmart, or First United Methodist (or Presbyterian or Lutheran or Baptist...) Church. Furthermore, any bureaucracy has but one ultimate goal—its own self-perpetuation. This is why churches must hire the most eloquent orators as their CEO (pastor). Such a gifted one will have great appeal to the residents of that community, so as to increase their membership rolls, preferably with a good sprinkling of wealthy and generous patrons (members) to keep the coffers sufficiently funded. This goal of self-perpetuation, while never formally stated, supersedes all stated goals of any church organization in question, such as “reaching the lost for Christ,” “taking the message of the gospel to the world,” or any other stated mission agenda. Therefore, the *bureaucrurch*⁴ must impose demands upon those enslaved to this system. A potential crisis may ensue if this corporate agenda is disrupted. The power of the bureaucracy is brought to bear on anyone (including the Holy Spirit) who might upset the protocol.

This need for bureaucratic control is just as evident in conservative churches, even Pentecostal and charismatic churches, as in liberal churches. Several years back, just prior to my call out of organized Christianity, I was part of a small praise band in a small denominational church. God began to move in an early worship service that had been initiated especially to foster a more informal and “contemporary” atmosphere. The presence of the Holy Spirit became very heavy

⁴ Please see the article [Bureaucrurch](http://www.wordforthebride.net) posted on the Books and Articles page of www.wordforthebride.net for a more thorough discussion of the bureaucratic nature of the organized church system.

during one particular service in direct response to the reading of a portion of scripture by a young man who was recovering from alcohol and drug addiction. I have learned that God uses the least among us when He wants to accomplish something significant in His kingdom. People began coming forward to the altar and weeping before the Lord. In the middle of the praise set, before the pastor had an opportunity to preach, members of the praise band were also finding their way down to the altar. The Holy Spirit was disrupting the agenda. Church leaders were not pleased, despite the fact that the day before they had called a gathering to pray for God to move that Sunday! The problem was that God did not move according to *their* personal or bureaucratic agenda. When called before the worship committee the next week, the only defense of the praise team was that we knew the Holy Spirit was moving, and we wanted to give Him free reign to move as *He* pleased. The chair of the worship committee, who had a reputation for being spiritually sensitive, squirmed at this, then looked at me and said, “Chuck, in the future, do you think you could give the Spirit free reign between 8:00 and 8:20?” He was serious! This man was caught between a true desire to see God move and the demands of a bureaucratic system that required that “everything be done decently and in order.” The bondage that he was under because of these demands was palpably evident.

I know that many of you reading this have your own stories to tell. I am sure that there have been times when the Spirit of God was rising up in you to say something, to pray for someone, to reach out and touch someone in some way, but you felt inhibited because it would disrupt the meeting. You knew that you would be likely looked upon with misgivings at best, and vilified at worst, if you were to faithfully respond to the Spirit’s promptings.⁵ Make no mistake, the inhibition that you felt at this time is truly the Anti-Christ spirit that is given free and unfettered reign in a bureaucratic church structure. You may have been given a word to speak publicly in your congregation or a small group, but were rebuked as “being out of order,” or worse yet, “hearing from the devil,” especially if God’s message through you did not conform to the teachings or agenda of that particular body. The pharaohs of this system (CEO pastors and lay leaders), will probably first attempt to talk you out of any further such unpredictable displays of Holy Spirit spontaneity. If this is not effective, not unlike the Pharaoh of ancient Egypt, they may “double down” by relegating you to “hard labor” outside

⁵ I am not referring to those times when the Holy Spirit Himself gives checks because it is not the right timing for His Word. I am speaking of those instances in which you knew that the Spirit of the Lord was upon you to say a word or take an action

of the place of your calling or gifting. You must effectively be put in your place because it is of critical importance that the efficiency of the bureaucracy not be impeded.

This Anti-Christ spirit abounds because this fellowship, which calls itself the church is, first and foremost, a bureaucracy whose goals and purpose is *anything but* those of the true ecclesia of Jesus Christ. Oh yes, its *stated* purpose, printed up in all of the church material corresponds, at least in part, to what the body of Christ is to be all about. You will read in this material of how “this church is dedicated to sharing the gospel throughout our community and the world;” or “we are a body of believers committed to reaching the lost for Christ;” or possibly, “we believe that when we give drink to him who is thirsty, we are giving it to Christ.” All of this is part of the “official” purpose of the church. Behind this and certainly, though unstated, BEFORE this however, this body exists, ultimately, for purposes of its own self-perpetuation. The church of today is no different than any other bureaucracy in this regard. Any given bureaucracy has a stated purpose. Walmart’s purpose is to bring goods to the consumer at the lowest price possible. United Airlines states that its purpose is to provide “friendly skies” to the traveling public with non-stop service to as many cities as possible. You and I both know, however, that the *real* purpose of Walmart and United, and any other commercial bureaucracy, is to provide the best bottom line for their shareholders and to stay in business for as long as possible operating generously in the black. This is no less true of non-profit organizations, and it is no less true for those non-profit 501(c)3 organizations that call themselves churches!

It is almost humorous to recall the original advertising promotions of the March of Dimes. Founded initially as National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (NFIP), by Franklin D. Roosevelt, their goal, was to eradicate polio. When they changed their name to the March of Dimes in 1938, they advertised that their goal was to put themselves out of business by eradicating polio. The March of Dimes was hugely successful in their effort to eradicate polio. But did this success put them out of business? Heavens no! They were by now a very large bureaucracy with many employees whose livelihood depended upon their staying in business. So, they simply shifted their focus to birth defects in the late 1950’s. You see, the *real* purpose of the March of Dimes—where the rubber hit the road—was to preserve and perpetuate the organization itself. And so it is with this organizational system that we have called “The Church.” It has lost its first love, as Jesus told the Ephesian church in Revelation 2:4. It has built up a gigantic organizational framework that ravenously demands the resources of time, money and human capital to sustain itself. The commission to make disciples of all nations (which

has been grossly misunderstood in most of Christendom anyway) has become but a means to extort more money out of the people—money which *primarily* goes toward the maintenance of the organization, including (often) a very healthy salary for the CEO and staff of that organization. The *bureaucrachurch* can accomplish these actual unvarnished goals by imposing harsh demands upon those living within its land. Please understand, dear friend, I am not suggesting that a life of radical commitment to Christ does not involve great demands—the taking up of a cross, in fact! The difference is, that He supplies us with the grace, power and the internal desire to fulfill these demands. The pharaohs of the *bureaucrachurch* have no such resources to offer God’s people in fulfilling the demands that *they* impose.

“Let My People Go!”

The religious institution has always depended upon Egyptian-style slavery to maintain its dominant position and tall steeples on the main streets and suburban mega-complexes throughout the communities of our land. Its pharaohs have fine-tuned their disciplinary actions when the people are not producing enough “bricks.” God is saying to these pharaohs “Let my people go!” just as He did in the days of Moses. If you are one of those “pharaohs” who have by God’s sovereign hand and purpose come across this book (I know there won’t be many, as this is not written primarily to organized church leaders), and God has been speaking to you through a “Moses” in your congregation—irritating though they may seem to you—to “let His people go,” I would caution you to listen reverently and with the fear of the Lord to that command. These that may seem like troublemakers to you are very often messengers sent by God urging you to free His people to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth rather than in the dictates of the organizational demands of the system over which you rule. Choosing to be like the Pharaoh of old who continued to harden his heart, and demand even more of these who speak forth Moses’ call to free His people (or worse yet, vilify them before the rest of your congregation) is to open yourself and your congregation to God’s wrath. Pharaoh of old didn’t escape this wrath and neither will you.

God is also tenderly but firmly calling to those caught in this enslavement to religious institutions, “Come out of her, my people.” He loves you enough to bring you a deliverer from the bondage in which you find yourself. God brings His deliverer in different ways and forms. My deliverer came in the form of people who were more advanced in the realm of the Spirit than I was. I recognized the life, the presence of Christ in these people, and the truth they spoke resonated deeply within me. There was a stirring deep within me to pursue more than I was

experiencing within the comfortable realms of my career, community and church life. These individuals were, themselves, out of, or coming out of institutional Christianity. They were there for me as I began this sojourn out, and encouraged me to be faithful to the Holy Spirit, regardless of what that entailed. They led me across the great Red Sea. One of them even became my life partner, who takes great joy in seeing that God rip the veil even if I have to kick and scream all the way!

I believe that the deliverer for many, if not most people, is another person more advanced in their walk in the Spirit. Because they have already walked in the realities of the Kingdom, they represent and model something that we could not have before imagined. Their qualification as our deliverer is based solely on the fact that they, themselves, have walked out of Egypt and spent their own time in the desert, just as Moses did thousands of years ago. Many times this deliverer comes to us in the form of writings of dead saints of long ago who have trod this lonely path. People such as Madame Jeanne Guyon, St. Theresa of Avila, Andrew Murray and Norman Grubb—to say nothing of the writings of contemporary saints, some of whom are linked on this website—are God’s deliverers and living epistles for a people that He is calling out of the Egyptian bondage of the harlot church today.

This will not be a mass exodus in response to a directive from some high-profile charismatic leader. As was Joshua, Moses was a type of Christ, and the call of our Lord in this new day of the Spirit is deeply personal, largely hidden from the masses and certainly hidden from the pharaoh’s of the religious monolith under which they have served. They are hearing the call through their Deliverer, one by one, to come out. They are usually misunderstood and often vilified. But their hearts are set on obedience to their Lord. A wilderness awaits them, as they are stripped of all of the positive reinforcement that would authenticate their own “goodness.” It is, indeed, a call to a life truly hid in Christ.

Leaving Egypt

The call has gone out to the pharaohs of our day to “let My people go.” These prophetic voices have sounded in churches across the land as God has raised up a multitude of Moses’s in small and large churches alike to speak forth His liberating Word of Life in the Spirit. For the most part, our modern-day pharaohs, those guardians of the religious establishment, have either ignored this liberating word, or have become threatened by it and have attempted to silence it. Others have attempted to manipulate and arrogate this precious Word to advance their own ministries. Despite these attempts to squelch and misappropriate this Word of

liberation from the bondage of Egypt, multitudes are now hearing deep within their spirits the cry of their Deliverer, to “come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4). More and more of God’s people are hearing this call. The pharaohs are befuddled and have convinced themselves that there is a growing “secularization” of the population. In response to this, they have developed all manner of strategies to hold on to their existing congregations, and to attract the multitudes who remain outside of their doors on Sunday mornings. They have developed “seeker friendly” services, complete with coffee bars and fast-food eateries to satiate the hunger of the physical belly as a foretaste of the spiritual junk food they are about to spoon feed them. This may satisfy the masses, but to that remnant who have heard the call to come out, these worldly business strategies only confirm that they have heard the call of God rightly.

This remnant who have heard the call to exodus Egypt are small in number, but I am of a conviction that their number is growing. In all probability, if you are still reading these pages and if they are resonating at all within you, you are part of that growing remnant. This remnant of which you are a part is scattered. You can probably count on one hand the number of people that you can even talk to about what God is doing within you. And so you move by faith, rarely having any confirmation from others that you are making the right decisions. Yet, this is the only decision that you can make. With Simon Peter you echo, “to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life!” (John 6:68).

The journey of the called-out-one is, by and large, a lonely journey. This is so by God’s design. He is called apart unto God, and is being prepared as a bride to come into a unique union with God that most know nothing about. A.W. Tozer understood this when he wrote, regarding the loneliness of this walk:

The truly spiritual man is indeed something of an oddity. He lives not for himself but to promote the interests of Another. He seeks to persuade people to give all to his Lord and asks no portion or share for himself. He delights not to be honored but to see his Saviour glorified in the eyes of men. His joy is to see Jesus promoted and himself neglected. He finds few who care to talk about that which is the supreme object of his interest, so he is often silent and preoccupied in the midst of noisy religious shoptalk. For this he earns the reputation of being dull and over-serious, so he is avoided and the gulf between him and society widens. He searches for friends upon whose garments he can detect the smell of myrrh and aloes and

cassia out of the ivory palaces, and finding few or none he, like Mary of old, keeps these things in his heart (Tozer, 1966).

In point of fact, this separation, this loneliness, is all a part of the next part of your journey in Christ. I am speaking of that dry place, that place where it often seems that God is not even there. I am speaking of *the wilderness*. Let's explore together, again with spirit eyes, this next place that the Lord has in store for those who have made the decision to... "come out of Egypt."

CHAPTER 2: THE WILDERNESS

Leaving Egypt was almost certainly the most daring and risky thing that the Hebrew people of that generation could have ever imagined doing. They left all that they had known—their way of life, their means of livelihood, and, without doubt, many relationships that had been forged with other Egyptians over 400 years of inhabiting that land. They were following a man—the Lord’s deliverer to be sure—who they really did not know that well because he had been away in the desert for forty years! Yet they knew that they must follow this emancipator, not knowing what was in store for them. The great Red Sea lay before them, Pharaoh’s army behind. Their liberator would lead them on toward the ominous Red Sea, believing that Yahweh would make a way. This way was miraculously provided, and once having crossed, the Great Sea came back together again, separating this people once and for all from the only land that they, in this generation, had ever known. They have just crossed their Rubicon. As the warriors of that mighty land were drowned in the Red Sea, Egypt was finally behind them. What lay ahead would be a wilderness that would test them as no other experience in their lives had done to that point. This wilderness experience was ordained by God to purge them of their Egyptian ways and mindset; to draw them back into faithful obedience to the God of their fathers—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and to prepare them to enter into and possess the land of promise that God had prepared for them.

Many, if not most of you reading this short book have crossed your own Rubicon. You have left organized religion, and have set out on a radical journey of faith that is bringing you into an intimate relationship with Christ such as you have not known before. You have listened to the voice of your deliverer, as He has called you to a place quite unfamiliar. You haven’t understood why, but you have known that you must be obedient to this voice. You have watched in amazement the parting of the seas of impossibilities facing you, only to watch as they came back together again to separate you from the only spiritual land that you have ever known, that being organized Christianity. This has resulted in a painful separation from family, friends, and heretofore valuable relationships, as those who remain in the Egypt of traditional organized religion do not understand this path on which God is taking you. You have questioned the voice of that Deliverer within you as you have faced the daunting Red Sea, and you have found that He has been faithful to take you across, rendering Pharaoh’s army helpless in their attacks against you. You have, after much testing and struggle, left Egypt.

Physically getting out of Egypt, however, does not mean that Egypt has been taken out of you. You have been infected during your sojourn into that land in which God never intended you to settle. You have taken in doctrines and creeds, and have accepted them, perhaps willy-nilly, not giving much thought to that which you were believing. Rather than checking these doctrines with the Spirit within, you may have simply accepted them because the preacher said so. Over the years, they might have taken on the authority of Holy Writ and you have dared not question them. The doctrines of man that have been construed from scripture—sometimes in a most twisted way to accommodate human agendas—include the doctrines of tithing, the rapture, heaven, hell, the kingdom of God, grace, and salvation itself to name just a few. The many doctrines about God, man, and man’s relationship to God that we have learned while in Egypt, are part of the old wineskin that will not hold the new wine of the Spirit, and needs to be purged from our consciousness.

Beyond doctrine, we have learned that there is a proper way of assembling, on a proper day of the week. We have learned that there is one class of people who are specially designated to lord it over another class of people for purposes of attempting to instill some of the doctrines that we have talked about above. We have learned to be obedient, not to Christ, but to those false heads who would lord it over us. God is intent, not only in bringing us out of Egypt, but also in purging us of all of those things that we have internalized while in that religious land of bondage. This purging requires that we be set aside from all of the accoutrements that would stroke our religious ego so that God can begin to speak His uncontaminated truth into us. This purging and all that accompanies it comprises the wilderness, the next step in our spiritual quest.

The journey of faith, if it is authentic, will inevitably take you to the wilderness. Preachers have preached about this. Songs and hymns have been written about it. Those who have traveled any time at all in their journey with Christ recognize this place. It is a place that you would prefer to avoid. To those who are truly called of Christ, however, the wilderness is unavoidable. Not even Jesus was exempt from it. This wilderness is a lonely place—a place of separation from friends and loved ones. This separation may not be a physical separation, but you recognize that you do not have the basis for companionship with loved ones that you once had. This is a place of being misunderstood, and sometimes even being persecuted. Much of the time there is no *feeling* of being spiritual here. In fact, you probably *felt* much closer to God while you were being entertained by the praise bands and ear-tickling words of the preachers in the fellowships that you attended before being called out to this wilderness. You may sometimes even

wonder if you have backslidden or made a misstep along the way because God seems so distant.

You haven't. God wants you to know, in fact, that through the most bewildering times, the most challenging times, the most discouraging times—you are being faithful to Him. You have been bonded to Him so strongly, that *nothing* can separate you from the love of God—not even the feelings of alienation from Him. And friends, the good news is that despite how it feels, this is a time when God is doing His deepest work in you. He is rejoicing at the simple fact that you are continuing to put one foot in front of the other, not understanding why, not even seeing clearly the purpose to which you have been called. More than any other time in your journey, you are truly walking by *faith* while in the wilderness, not by sight, and you need to know that this pleases the heart of God more than you can imagine!

You need to know also that while you are indeed going through this journey alone in terms of your experience of it, you are not, *in fact*, alone. Countless others are in the same fix that you are in. This is an experience that is shared by all who have ever taken this journey of faith. We will be examining three related wilderness journeys in scripture that foreshadow the wilderness journey that God has in store for all of us. The story of the wilderness journey of the children of Israel provides the primary biblical context from which to understand our own wilderness. Before jumping into the story of these ancient Israelites, however, we will be looking at two other wilderness experiences which are also instructive for us. We will examine, first, the 40 days of testing that Jesus experienced after His baptism by John. Following this, we will look briefly at the 40-year wilderness through which the Lord took Moses as He prepared him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. This, in turn, prompted the wilderness journey for the entire nation of Israel as they wandered another 40 years before entering the Promised Land. That journey we will then take up at length as it parallels so much of what God's people today face on their wilderness journey.

Before looking at these wilderness journeys, it is worth taking note that all of them involved a period of 40 days or years. The number 40 is both fascinating and significant. In addition to the three wilderness experiences of 40 days/years that we will be examining here, we also observe that after the children of Israel entered the wilderness, Moses spent 40 days atop Mt. Sinai without food or water waiting upon the Lord to write upon the tablets the second time. We also note that during the 40-year wilderness sojourn 12 men were sent out to spy out the Promised Land for 40 days. Elsewhere, we see Noah and his family shut up in

the ark for 40 days while God sent a flood to kill every living thing which was not contained in the ark. The prophet Ezekiel lay on his side 40 days for Israel's sins. These are but a few of the many instances of the number 40 in scripture. This number is seen so many times in scripture that it would behoove us to understand its significance. The number 40 is almost always used in connection with experiences or events that involve testing and trial or cleansing and purging. I think we can say, as most biblical scholars do, that this number is symbolic of testing and/or cleansing when it is found in scripture. It should come as no surprise to us that this *is* the purpose of the wilderness experience!

We have learned to read these stories in scripture as historical accounts of the dealings of God with His people, but they are so much more than this. It is important to remember that these accounts are natural, historical events which represent, as shadows and types, spiritual realities that all of God's people must experience if we are to reach that place in the Spirit to which we are destined. And so, we approach Jesus' time in the wilderness, and the wilderness experiences of Moses, and then the 40 year wandering of the ancient Hebrews as "pictures" of the journey that we are on. There is a spiritual counterpart in our own wilderness experience for the historical events and challenges that faced God's people so long ago. Let us reflect on these experiences, with eyes of the Spirit, so that we can gain greater appreciation and understanding of that which we are experiencing.

Jesus Is Tempted of the Devil Forty Days

We would do well to first take note that immediately after Jesus was baptized by John, and the Holy Spirit announced His Sonship, Jesus was *led by the Spirit* into the wilderness for at least 40 days. This was not a foray into the wilderness because of some misstep on Jesus' part. The Spirit of God Himself took Him there. Jesus knew that this was the time of testing that we all would face on our journey of obedience to Him. As the Pattern Son, Jesus understood that He must go before us and experience the testing and refining process that we would all eventually face.

Jesus experienced great hunger during this time, for scripture tells us that he fasted forty days. Not surprisingly, the offer of food is the first temptation that Satan brought to him: "*If you are the son of God, command these stones become bread.*" As we shall see below, the longing to fill their hunger was one of the first temptations that the children of Israel faced when they were taken into the wilderness. What's more, if these experiences are a picture of the wilderness that is in store for us, it would benefit us to reflect upon this further.

Both in my own experience, and in the experiences that I have observed of others, one of the first complaints of the wilderness sojourner is spiritual hunger—or at least what seems to us to be spiritual hunger. Much of it is merely soulish hunger for those things which titillate our senses. We long to go back to the fleshpots of Egypt where, despite the fact that we were in bondage, we felt “full.” We could count on the routines that organized Christianity could offer. We could depend on a pastor to “feed” us, in addition to the steady diet of praise and worship, and even the observation of signs and wonders that gave us the sense of being “fed.” The problem is, we needed another “meal” within days and we were once again dependent upon the rulers of this Egyptian system to feed us week after week. Our life in Egypt under the pharaohs of organized religion was much more akin to a narcotics addict needing his next fix than it was to truly being fed of the Spirit of God. Jesus said that whoever ate of the bread that he had to offer would *never* hunger again. Surely, this is a different kind of food than that of which we partook in our former days of religion.

Jesus told the tempter that was invading His mind and soul that man must live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. This Word (capital W) is *living* and comes from the mouth of God which includes all those men and women who live by this Word and speak it. The wilderness is designed to teach us to feed on the Bread of Life which is the very Word of God that we, and others, speak by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The wilderness is designed to wean us from the bread made from stones. We will go through periods of intense loneliness, and hunger for the fellowship and soulish satisfaction that the organized church provided us. Gone are the Sunday school classes, the feel-good worship services, the potluck suppers and the powerful oratory to stimulate our minds. Tragically, countless sojourners succumb to the lure of the harlot. These have not counted the cost. They were not prepared for hunger pangs. They do not fully understand what is going on with them in this desolate place, and give in to the pressure to come back to the system of bondage that they left, believing that they were mistaken in taking this sojourn out of Egypt. Oh, if they could only understand that the hunger they are experiencing is part of the plan of God for them, to refine them and make them wholly dependent upon Him as their Bread that will leave them perfectly fed spiritually!

Jesus was then tempted to throw Himself down from the temple because if He truly was the Son of God, the angels would bear Him up and would protect Him from bodily harm. Jesus responded from scripture that “Thou shalt not tempt the

Lord thy God.” How often do we “tempt” God while in the wilderness? We become discouraged by our circumstances. Life does not seem to be going our way. Perhaps the bottom falls out of our finances or our health, or threatens to. Our friends keep their distance. We begin to complain, “Why did the Lord allow this to happen?” “He could have stopped this and He didn’t.” “What kind of a God are you anyway!” The good news, friend, is that our Heavenly Father is not taken aback by our tempting Him. He does not patronize us by giving in to our childish demands or temper tantrums. Neither does He leave us or forsake us. He is there, even when we have no awareness of His presence. In fact, this is often a time when he *cannot* make His presence be known to us if He is to accomplish His purpose in us. All we see is His backside, and it feels like He has not protected us from dashing our feet against the rock as a result of our vain efforts to make something happen. We need to know that not a hair of our head escapes his watchful eye over us. He is teaching us to stop squirming. He is building within us a trust in Him that defies our circumstances. He is doing a deep work that, when complete, leaves us with a peace that passes all understanding. Know and understand that God’s creative work in you is not measured by how favorable your circumstances, nor does this marvelous work stand or fall on your correct response to each and every circumstance. You have surrendered yourself to Him and He is taking you from there. With the apostle Paul you can say, “He who has begun a good work in [me] will be faithful to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

To test the faithfulness of God, the tempter would have you throw yourself down from the temple, by demanding that He intervene and insisting that He perform according to your liking or comfort. Jesus had a cross to face in about three short years. Whether or not he fully understood at the time of His temptation that the cross was facing him, He was being prepared for it nevertheless. He agonized in the garden, and asked the Father if there was any way that He could take this cup from him. Nevertheless, “not my will but yours be done.” He would not demand of the Father that He take the cup from Him as a test of God’s faithfulness to him. He had fully surrendered to the Father, and it had already been tested in the wilderness. So it is that the impossible circumstances that we face in the wilderness are designed to test that place of full surrender. If we are truly followers of Christ, we will also encounter our cross—our place of voluntary suffering and death—that we are being prepared for even as we encounter circumstances that would tempt us to test God by insisting that He catch our fall so that we can avoid drinking of the cup of His suffering. You can be confident, that *despite your circumstances*, He is faithful! You are being asked to *accept*

your circumstances, and His providence in them, trusting that there is ultimately a resurrection that He will accomplish in you.

Finally, the tempter takes Jesus to a high mountain and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world—promising to give them to Him if He will but bow down and worship Him. Satan had the power to do this. Indeed, it would not have been a temptation if Satan did not have this power! Jesus was single-minded. He ordered Satan away, saying “it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'” One of the great temptations in the wilderness is to attempt, in our own flesh, to establish our own significance in the Kingdom of God. We have sacrificed much in leaving Egypt. We have given up all to follow Christ. We have experienced a stripping such as we have never known before. It becomes a matter of great importance that this sacrifice not be in vain. We then attempt to establish kingdoms of our own making, even believing that these efforts are a direct response to the call of God.

I recall so clearly that when I was going through a major stripping in my life, I made a decision to move to Arkansas with my family to join a ministry here. This was, as I look back and reflect, a set-up by the Lord to motivate me to leave a career of some 30 years—a career in which I had become far too comfortable. I had also left the church, and by this time I had understood that God was calling me out of organized religion. Nevertheless, I came to Arkansas with certain expectations for ministry—expectations that were never met. That ministry attempt fell through almost immediately. Wanting to believe that my move here was not in vain, I decided to train to be an over-the-road truck driver and took a job with a company based in northwest Arkansas. I always wanted to drive a truck, but I justified doing this by believing that God was calling me to be a missionary to truck drivers. On my first trip out I got in an accident in a truck stop, followed soon by another truck stop incident. I developed an intense fear of going into truck stops! Within about 4 months I was losing sleep and dreaded going out on the road. I realized that, once again, I was trying to make something happen in my own flesh.

I have no regrets for any of this. God was in control throughout, and allowed my feeble efforts to establish my own kingdom. In the economy of God, I *had* to experience these defeats so that I could learn true obedience to the Spirit. My heart was right, but there was much to learn, and that is exactly what my wilderness has been designed to do. And so is yours. I have no doubt that there are those reading these words who have been strongly tempted by Satan’s third great temptation of Jesus. And many of you have probably succumbed to this

temptation just as I have—perhaps several times. Each time you do, a little more of your self-aggrandizing flesh is being consumed in the refiner’s fire. Do not doubt for one moment that God is in full control, even when you attempt to take control, and with each attempt He is working your need for recognition out of you. Through these experiences, He is bringing you to a place of total surrender, so that His will becomes *your* will.

Jesus successfully met each of these temptations with overcoming power. This does not mean that He did not struggle. They would not truly have been temptations if He did not struggle fiercely. We, too, will successfully meet the temptations that come to us in the wilderness only as we are fully surrendered to Him. This does not mean that we will not have failures. It is in these very failures that we are being made into the image of the Pattern Son, and our surrender becomes complete. Only in the fierce struggle of the wilderness can we become overcomers, and it is here that our sonship is established. This is cause for great rejoicing!

Moses Spends Forty Years in the Desert

I am sure that you know the story of how Moses was rescued by the Pharaoh’s daughter, and was raised as Egyptian royalty. He had it all. He knew, however, that he was a Hebrew and obviously had a strong love for the Hebrew people. One day, while out and about, he noticed that one of his own countrymen was being beaten by an Egyptian. Apparently Moses was strong of stature for the scripture simply says that he killed the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand, thinking that no one saw him. The next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting with each other. Moses asked the one who had done the initial wrong, why he was fighting his fellow Hebrew. He was rebuked and asked what made him the judge over them? Was he going to kill them as he killed the Egyptian? Suddenly, Moses became full of fear and fled to the desert because he knew that he was now a marked man.

It is important to take note that Moses was really forced into the desert. He had it made in the courts of the Pharaoh. Circumstances, however, now dictated that he leave if he was to save his life. We will also see this dynamic at work prior to the children of Israel leaving Egypt to go into the wilderness.

Most of us would not *voluntarily* choose the wilderness. Oh, we voluntarily make an initial surrender of our lives to Christ, but in the doing of this, we cannot possibly know what this will mean. We probably know that it will be costly, but we do not know exactly what this cost will be, and we certainly do not volunteer to lay our head on the chopping block until it becomes clear to us that we have no

other choice if we are to be faithful to Christ. Moses loved the Hebrew people, and he knew that he was one of them. Despite the fact that he had all the privileges of Pharaoh's court, his heart was with his Hebrew countrymen. When push came to shove, he knew where his loyalties lie. At the same time, he did not have any idea of what this loyalty would cost him. All he knew is that he had to kill the Egyptian; and then intervene in the squabble between the Hebrews. I suspect that he did this with no thought as to the possible consequences. He just knew that he had to do it. These actions thrust him into circumstances that would quickly take him out of Pharaoh's court and all of its privileges. He had to flee into the wilderness. We don't know too much about the details of his life in the wilderness, but you can bet that they were a far cry from the lap of luxury he knew in Pharaoh's palace. He was being prepared to lead a rebellious people out of the most civilized and powerful dynasty of his time. Scripture does, however, provide some instructive information about this time for Moses.

The first thing that we probably notice is that Moses, now about age 40, begins tending sheep. He has a major career change, and it is *not* one of upward mobility! The wilderness will almost surely require a withdrawal from our former way of life. This may or may not mean that we will have to resign our positions or leave our home communities. These positions and activities, however, which once occupied a central place in our lives, and which were the basis for our sense of purpose, now become without meaning or purpose comparatively. There are other things which now occupy our attention. It will often be that these things will seem quite lowly to us, and we will probably wonder from time to time why we are doing this. But somehow, we know that we really do not have a choice. We have lost the drive for what we once did, and even though we don't understand what we are doing now or why we are doing it, we can do nothing else. And as we do, we wait, we listen...we let God do what He must do within us.

We also learn when we read the Exodus account of Moses' time in the desert that he took a wife. This represents a sense of permanence as he established family ties there, not only with his wife but with her extended family as well. Moses would now be part of a much larger kinship system, and his very livelihood was now tied to his father-in-law Jethro. This relationship will become important later in Moses' life as well, when he is leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. The point to be made here, however, is that Moses put down roots in the wilderness. We often hear it preached today that we are not to become too comfortable in the wilderness because this is not to be our permanent dwelling place. While there is an element of truth to this, there is something that we can learn from Moses' experience. While the preachers mean well by what they say, these

messages often result in unnecessary guilt, frustration and doubt among those who find themselves in the wilderness much longer than they planned. Such messages as these imply that our wilderness sojourn is to be only a short time, and if we are here too long, it must mean that we are enjoying the wilderness. These messages do a great disservice to those on this sojourn, and to the body of Christ generally, because they become just another source of discouragement to those who are already confronting great challenges. Such messages also have the effect of making those who are Promised Land bound to want to abort this journey, thinking that they must have made some misstep along the way. As months turned into years in my own wilderness journey, these old tapes from well-meaning sermons in the past would play in my mind as I wondered if I were getting some sort of sick enjoyment out of my desert wanderings. I now recognize this as the voice of the enemy seeking to discourage me from pressing forward toward the destiny that God has in store for me—and for others through me. The simple truth is that our time in the wilderness is usually much lengthier than these preachers would have us believe. We do have to make a life there, even though we know we are moving toward our time of completion and unveiling as the glorious sons of God. God both uses us and speaks through us in the wilderness. There is every evidence that Moses participated fully in the desert life of his extended family. We will as well, each in our own way. We are in the refiner's fire, to be sure, but we have this knowledge: that we are here by His appointment and are being made into gloriously perfect sons of God!

We see the evidence of the deep work of the wilderness when God calls Moses from within the burning bush. God tells him that He has seen the oppression of His people in Egypt and that He is now about to deliver them. He is sending Moses to go to the Pharaoh to demand their release and to bring about their deliverance. Moses replies, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" This response is most telling. There is no trace of the former self-confidence that characterized his actions against the Egyptian 40 years earlier. Gone is the self-assurance that he had when he sought to serve as the mediator between the two squabbling Hebrew men. Moses has clearly been emptied of all such confidence in his own abilities. He has to know from the Lord what he is to do and say to every hypothetical situation that he can think of. Despite the personal demonstration of power that the Lord provided him by turning the rod into a snake and back, and turning his hand leprous and then restoring it, Moses lacked all self confidence in going forward. What God was trying to get Moses to see in these demonstrations of power is that it was not in his (Moses') ability that this task would or even could

be completed. God was demonstrating *His* power. But Moses could not get beyond his own sense of inadequacy. After everything God had done to demonstrate His power, Moses' only response was, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10). Eventually, Moses begs the Lord to send someone else.

Scripture then records that the Lord's anger was kindled against Moses. This is a curious response on God's part because Moses was responding in this way out of a depleted sense of self-righteousness or of his own personal adequacy. This is the very thing that Moses' wilderness was designed to accomplish in him. One would think that God should be pleased! Ah, but now God was asking Moses to move forth, not in his own strength, but in and through the power of God. The wilderness had so taken away Moses' confidence in himself that he was now having difficulty trusting that God would actually call him to this task! Is this not our experience as well? We have learned well our inadequacy. We have grown accustomed to inactivity as God has put us on the shelf for a season and taken us through the refining fire. We have learned well that we cannot accomplish *anything* in our own strength. Friends, God *is* pleased with this. The potter has been perfecting His vessel. But as we move through the refining process, God will give us opportunity to step out in faith. We will not understand what it is that God is calling us to do, or why He is asking us to do it. The ground is shifting. We are given an opportunity to now move forth in *His* strength rather than our own. We are tentative in doing this. We doubt, perhaps, that this is God asking us to do it in the first place, and that this is just our flesh wanting to establish its prominence once again. We have learned not to trust ourselves, but God is now asking us to fully place our trust in Him. Friends, if you have been in the wilderness for any length of time, be aware that God may be asking you to step out in faith, as He moves you forward toward, and eventually into, the Promised Land. This will not be something that you are comfortable in doing. It will not be something that you can do in your natural strength or wisdom. It may look foolish. We must be prepared to be confronted by God while in the wilderness just as Moses was. This thing I know: God is getting ready to bring about the greatest deliverance mankind has ever known. He has been raising up deliverers in the wilderness. When He calls upon us to move by His Spirit, He knows that He has well prepared us for it!

Forty Years of Wandering in the Wilderness

The Hebrews enjoyed great prosperity in Egypt under the old Pharaoh, when Joseph was alive. The Lord did not want them to stay in Egypt, however. He had called them into a Promised Land—which was Canaan. Egypt was to be temporary. It was *not* the Promised Land, even though they had spent 400 years in that land, and the people were doing very well here. They were still subject to a foreign ruler, however. So God used another Pharaoh, who came into power after Joseph's death and who did not remember Joseph, to deal with them harshly. He put them to work in the desert heat making bricks. The labor was difficult, and the Egyptian taskmasters were not kind. Life in Egypt was no longer what it used to be. God had a plan for their deliverance in the form of Moses, but it would be 80 years after Moses' birth that this plan would be executed. God had an important purpose in the suffering of the Hebrews, however. It was this very suffering that gave them the incentive to leave Egypt when God's time would come to deliver them.

Egypt is a Place of Bondage

Egypt is usually a very comfortable place. Many of us have cultivated a good lifestyle and have been nicely rewarded with good jobs, a model family and dependable friends. Why would we want to leave? God loves us enough to make our circumstances difficult in Egypt to give us the incentive to leave. And so He causes a wrinkle in our otherwise smooth lives--perhaps financial distress or a health issue. Egypt still looks good. In fact, that is all that we know, so we labor all the harder trying to maintain this lifestyle. Life on the hamster wheel intensifies as we labor feverishly making our version of bricks. We are at the mercy of the pharaoh's in our lives, and not even aware of our need for deliverance. The pharaoh in our lives may be a demanding career. Many people, especially in more conservative religious circles, find themselves under the brutal regime of legalism. Still others serve the harsh taskmaster of a fear of man, continually seeking the approval of others in their community. Most of you reading this have been part of an organized church that, over time, has placed increasing demands on you. *Anything* that would keep us from pursuing God with abandon represents a "pharaoh" for us.

The sober truth is that we are often not even aware that we are in bondage and in need of deliverance while we are in the land of Egypt. Despite the hard labor, it was not within the realm of consciousness of the Hebrew children that there was an alternative to Egypt. It took a deliverer to confront the Pharaoh and to demand that he let the Hebrew people go. God brings His deliverer in different

ways and forms. As I shared in Chapter 1, my deliverer came in the form of people who were more advanced in the realm of the Spirit than was I. I am certain that this is also the case for many of you reading these lines. Others may have experienced this deliverer in books by contemporary or by-gone saints which you have read. Whoever your deliverer, their qualification as deliverer is based solely on the fact that they, themselves, have walked out of Egypt and spent their own time in the desert, just as Moses did thousands of years ago.

A predictable thing happened when Moses and Aaron demanded the Israelites' release. The Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he increased the brick-making demands. He now required them to gather their own straw for the bricks, while maintaining the same daily quota. The taskmasters became harsher. Egypt is controlled by a harsh ruler, friends! As long as we do not challenge that system life is bearable, even comfortable. When we begin to challenge that system, however, the ruler of this world becomes threatened. The point at which we make a decision to leave Egypt, to be obedient to the call of the Spirit, there will be push back, intimidation tactics from the enemy to discourage us. The enemy knows that the more time that we spend on this journey of obedience to the Spirit, the more difficult it will be for him to discourage us. Many of you have experienced well-intentioned friends trying to "talk sense" into you. You may have even had to face ostracism and other hard ball tactics by people who are convinced that you have gone off the deep end. As you begin to share what God is revealing to you with your pastor or church leaders, they seek to correct you, trying to make you believe that you are being deceived. When you are not deterred, high pressure strategies are invoked. Some of you have experienced all manner of slander from the mouth of religious leaders who are threatened by your obedience. All the forces of hell are aligned against the coming out of the sons of God.

The good news, friend, is that God is bigger than the Pharaoh. In fact, the Exodus account states that it was God who hardened the heart of the Pharaoh! He did this, I believe, so that the children of Israel could witness His mighty power to deliver them. The Lord brought ten plagues upon Egypt before Pharaoh finally relented and released the Hebrew children. The last plague was the killing of the firstborn males of all the land of Egypt, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, to the lowest servant, including even the firstborn male of all of every animal in Egypt. This was the occasion for the Passover, when, upon seeing the blood over the doorposts of the households of His people, the death angel would pass over that household and not bring death to the firstborn of Israel. The Passover is such an important event that God uses this to mark the beginning of the Hebrew

calendar! This is the plague that finally penetrated the heart of Pharaoh, and he agreed to let the Hebrew children go.

Bonding to God's Heart at the Red Sea

The softening of Pharaoh's heart would be only temporary, however. He reconsidered what he had done, and gathered his armies to pursue the Israelites. We know the story of how, when the children of Israel were caught between the Red Sea on one side and Pharaoh's army on the other, the Lord parted the waters of the Red Sea which allowed the Israelites to pass through on dry land. As Pharaoh's army pursued them, once they reached the other side, God stopped the wind, the waters retreated, and Pharaoh's army was thoroughly drenched...or something like that! Once again, God was demonstrating His power and His care for His people. This would be an occasion for them to remember as they would face difficult circumstances in the wilderness.

I believe that this experience of the Israelites is a universal experience of the chosen people of God today whom He has called out of Egypt. Whatever our circumstances were in Egypt, God demonstrates His awesome power in our lives and thereby bonds us to Him powerfully. For me, it was the deliverance from a stronghold in my life that had held me captive for all of my adult life—more than 20 years. I was powerless over it, but God demonstrated His power! I can, to this day, remember that incredible experience like it was yesterday. It was powerful, and it bonded my heart to my Lord as nothing else had ever done to that time. Others experience the breaking of drug and alcohol addictions. Someone else might experience the restoration of a marriage, with Christ now at its center. The circumstances are varied, but they are all designed to bond our hearts to the Lord, for we will need this in the days, weeks, months and even years of wilderness ahead.

It is interesting that God did not take the Hebrew children by way of the shortest route, which would have been through land inhabited by the Philistines. He knew that they would be intimidated by the Philistines. He had to build up in them a trust and confidence in Him before facing these giants. This was the purpose of the Red Sea experience. There would be other obstacles, challenges and circumstances that God would use in the lives of these people to prepare them to enter the land of promise for which He was positioning them. And such is the purpose of these bonding experiences in all of our lives.

A Terrible History of Complaining

The children of Israel had a history of complaining on this journey. They complained when Pharaoh's slave drivers increased the burden for brickmaking. They complained when hedged in between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. "Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness?" they cried. "[I]t would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness" (Exodus 14: 11,12). This is a pattern that developed early in their wilderness experience, and it was repeated many times throughout the course of the journey. God was not pleased with this response. It is probably the most deadly response that we can have. Jesus said that it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth (Matt. 15:11). There is power in the spoken word, and when we speak with complaining we begin to feel our burdens even more. We lose sight of the One who has called us, and we forget all of the times and ways that He has demonstrated his power and trustworthiness in our lives. Believe me, I know. I probably beat the record for complaining set thousands of years ago by the Hebrew children! I know the power of this spoken word. It is such an easy seduction to get our eyes off Christ and on to our circumstances. When we then voice our fears, doubts, and complaints, these circumstances only loom larger, and it becomes a vicious cycle that will kill and destroy the vitality of our walk with Christ. If you find yourself in this cycle, I would urge you to *repent* of this, and begin speaking God's truth by faith once again. You will not *feel* this truth, nor will there always be things in your circumstances that give you a basis for thus speaking forth. You speak it because God put it in your heart at one point to venture on this journey, and He tells you to open your mouth so He can fill it (Psalms 81:10). He has called you here, and He has a marvelous destiny for you. This is His promise, and *this* is what you speak despite the fact that there are no feelings or corroborating evidence behind it! God is training us to walk by faith. Through *all* of our circumstances—good and bad—He is teaching us to walk by faith and not by sight. When we walk by faith, we can speak only what we see by faith, for *this* is the reality in which we walk. Our journey is not one of wandering around aimlessly in a wilderness, even though this is how it appears to the one who does not walk by faith. No, dear brothers and sisters! Like faithful Joshua and Caleb, who we discuss below and in future chapters, our journey is one of walking *through* the wilderness *to* the Promised Land! This, the Promised Land, is what we see through the eyes of faith. And He is faithful to bring us there.

After crossing the Red Sea, there were certainly challenges encountered by the Hebrew children. The waters were bitter at Marah. They experienced hunger as

well. Once again, they murmured against Moses. Once again, they looked back to Egypt where, despite their oppression, they were fed well. I do not think it a coincidence that the first temptation that Jesus faced in His wilderness was the challenge to turn the stones into bread. He hungered. The wilderness is, indeed, a place of hungering.

The first hunger that we experience is for the things that we once had and which we now miss. We may have been accustomed to a lot of activity in the church or in community affairs. We may have been in positions of power and influence. We may have had the luxury of many friends with whom to socialize. These or other things which we have used to fill our souls are the very things that God is stripping us of in the wilderness. The feeling of deprivation can be intense, especially early on. We even begin to wonder if we made the right decision. Did we *really* hear God? None of our friends are affirming this decision. Oh, how we hunger for the affirmation of others!

Something happens at some point in our wilderness journey, however. If we can resist the temptation to go back to Egypt, and if we can learn to trust Father in even the dire circumstances, we begin to notice a change in our hunger pangs. We realize, perhaps one morning when we wake up, that we really *don't* want to go back to Egypt. Our desires have changed. I remember so clearly, about a year after leaving my teaching position, and right after I quit driving truck, that I applied for a job at a local community college here in Arkansas because I was getting frustrated with this wilderness. I wanted to do *something* to feel productive. But right after I applied for this position I realized that I had no desire to go back into the classroom. God had called me to something else, and almost imperceptibly, He was draining out of me the desire for the Egyptian life I had known before. I realized that I was longing for whatever He had in store for me. Oh yes, God is at work within you during this wilderness journey in ways that you do not even realize! As the lure back to Egypt is being worked out of you, you discover another hunger of which you were never before so aware. It is a hunger to walk in the fullness of what God has destined for you. There is a deep longing to commune with the Lord and to experience union with Him. Your mind is ever more occupied with what God is doing and the part that He has for you in all of this. It is no longer about building *your* ministry, but about knowing him. You realize that you have not even begun to plumb the depths of what God has in store and the longing of your heart is to explore this new terrain of the Spirit that is now opening up to you in fresh ways. Your hunger is no longer for Egypt, but it is now for the Promised Land!

God responded to the Israelites' hunger by raining manna from heaven. This was food that they had never seen before. In fact the word "manna" in Hebrew means "what is it?" God was providing, and He was providing with *new* food. Moreover, He fed them *daily*. They were given explicit instructions to gather each morning just enough manna for that day—except for the day before Sabbath when they were to gather enough for the Sabbath as well. If they were to gather more than what was needed, it would get worms and would rot. Friends, if ever there were an experience of the ancient Israelites that represents a shadow and a type of the wilderness journey to which the Lord has called us, it can be found in the manner in which they were fed. The bread with which we are fed while in the wilderness is unlike anything we have encountered before. It doesn't look or feel like that which we have been accustomed to feeding upon. We wonder, "What is it?" It doesn't taste like anything we have known before. Sometimes it is even bitter. While in Egypt we were accustomed to feeding our *souls* on ear tickling orations from pedigreed clergy with several degrees behind their names. Alternatively, if we have come out of other churches such as Pentecostal or Charismatic traditions, we have had a diet of feel-good worship music, perhaps, or emotionally charged sermons that leave our soulish man saying, "My, wasn't the pastor anointed today!" Some on this wilderness journey may not come out of formal church backgrounds prior to answering the call to Christ. (I believe that we will see more and more of these "non-churched" sojourners.) Your manna was perhaps a diet of television—even Christian television. This has been *soul food* that we have been feasting on, and we have become accustomed to satisfying the desires of our carnal mind. The food that God is introducing us to in the wilderness is *spirit food*. We are being weaned from the soul food, and this is often not pleasant, especially at first. But somewhere deep, below the level of our soul, our spirits are being fed. It is just the right food for us to be growing and maturing into the sons that we have been called to be. While there may be times for feasting, normally we are given bread *daily*, just as Jesus taught his disciples to pray. The Lord is teaching us to be dependent upon Him for our sustenance on a daily basis. Many of us have been accustomed to going from meeting to meeting, conference to conference, indulging ourselves on a smorgasbord of junk food that is making somebody rich. This is not the way God feeds His children in the wilderness, and it is not the food that prepares us to rule and reign with Him as sons.

It is noteworthy, however, that this is not the last time that the children of Israel complain because of their hunger. They would grow tired of the manna that was being rained down, and they wanted meat. The Lord is once again angry with

their complaining, but it is Moses who is carrying the burden. He is caught between the Lord's anger and the peoples' felt needs. It is now Moses who cries out to the Lord, challenging Him, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people?" God responds to Moses by having him bring some 70 elders whom Moses recognizes as leaders. The burden will be shared with them. Despite God's anger, He recognizes the struggle, and He is intent on bringing His people into the Promised Land. He sees that Moses is coming to the end of himself. He raises up leaders to share in this burden. This is God's provision for a wilderness people. I have witnessed the frustration and distress of people as they attempt to negotiate the wilderness path. I know too well how overwhelming that it can be. The enemy would tempt us to turn back to Egypt where there is tasty food for our souls. Yet, we have been through too much to turn back now. God has placed a deep burden on my heart for others who have tasted of the deep things of the Spirit, but for whom the lure of Egypt continually pulls them back. The burden for God's people who have begun this journey is great. How grateful I am for others who have gone before me who, not even knowing me, have borne this burden that I may experience the victory of the Promised Land. It is now with joy that I share this burden to see the increase of the Kingdom in others!

Battles with the Enemy

Shortly after crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites find themselves in battle with the Amalekites. The Amalekites clearly do not represent the threat that the Philistines do because God directed them through the Red Sea with the express purpose of avoiding the Philistines. He knew they would be overwhelmed by their power. Nevertheless, the wilderness is full of enemies who would keep us from reaching our Promised Land. We must learn to defeat these enemies because the Promised Land itself is occupied by enemy forces which must also be overcome when we arrive there. There is training for spiritual warfare that takes place in the wilderness. The children of Israel clearly saw the hand of God in this battle. Whenever Moses' hands were raised, the Israelites were victorious; when Moses' arms became tired and he let down his hands, they suffered defeat. And so it was that Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms to secure the victory. This was a battle that was won first in the Spirit and then on the battlefield. And it was won in the Spirit through the unified effort of Moses, Aaron and Hur. These leaders learned to function as one body in that place, and this is what secured the victory. Moses then ordered that a memorial be built to commemorate this. The

Lord was instilling in his people the importance of remembering His mighty works among them.

This was but the first of several battles that they would face in the wilderness, and there would be still more battles to face once they reached the Promised Land. The Lord has promised them that He will go before them in all of their battles and He will defeat the enemy. For their part, the children of Israel are not to enter into any covenants with the enemies that they confront. We must understand that the spiritual life is warfare—whether we find ourselves in the wilderness or in the Promised Land. There is an enemy in the land. This is an enemy that will use all sorts of strategies to defeat us. When the enemy cannot defeat us through frontal assault, he will attempt to seduce us, as was the case when the Moabite women seduced the men of Israel. Later, after reaching the Promised Land, the enemy (Gibeon) enters into a deceptive covenant with Israel, even though the Lord is very clear that the Israelites are not to make covenants with any of the foreign peoples they encounter. This makes great problems for them later. They are to be a pure and separate people. God is still calling His people today to “come out from among them.” There can be no compromise with the systems of man, no relationships forged, no entanglements that would distract or impede the moving forth of the Kingdom of God within and among us.

Learning to Function as a Free People Under God’s Rule

There is an interesting scene presented in the eighteenth chapter of Exodus. Moses’ father-in-law comes to visit him, and sees that his entire day is spent settling disputes among the people. Jethro gives Moses a little fatherly advice, urging him to (1) teach the people the statutes of God, and (2) to find godly men who can settle the minor disputes, so that Moses can focus on the more complex cases. What is revealed in this account is that there are conflicts among the Israelites that must be resolved. What a different place they are in now! When they were in Egypt, they were under the control of the taskmasters. They were told what to do. Practically every facet of their lives was controlled by the Egyptian overlords. They were now out from under this bondage, and in their new found freedom, they soon came into conflict with the wants and needs of others. Disputes arose which needed to be resolved. As long as we are under the dominion of a foreign ruler, whether this be the bureaucracy of our jobs and careers, or the established order of organized religion, there is comparatively little conflict; and when there is conflict there are established procedures to resolve this conflict. Life is relatively smooth. In the wilderness, however, life gets messy. The rules are less clear as we leave the bondage of Egypt and charter a new

course toward the Promised Land. Gone are all of the old rules and rule enforcers. We are learning to be directed instead by the Holy Spirit. All the while, our flesh and carnality is being dealt with and we see it rearing its ugly head as we encounter others on this wilderness road to freedom who are also experiencing the same refining fires as are we. There will be messy conflicts. Some of these conflicts will be with others who share our vision for the Promised Land, but who have different ideas as to how to get there. These are probably the easiest to resolve, as we learn to focus together on the vision that God has imprinted in our hearts. Other conflicts will be with those whose vision is still obscured. The refining fires of the wilderness have not yet exposed the dross in their lives and we find ourselves coming up against all manner of ungodly desires and motives. Hard words of correction may have to be spoken. Ultimately, if these impurities are not dealt with in the lives of these individuals, we will eventually have to part ways or risk being distracted from the vision birthed in us that has led us into this wilderness in the first place. Just as the Lord dealt severely with sin and carnality in the camp of Israel, even ordering death to perpetrators of evil, so it is that He will deal severely with unrighteousness in the camp today. He is purifying His sons, and if there are those who would undermine the purposes of God with another gospel, He will bring a separation. As sons-in-training we will be called upon to make judgments and to exercise great spiritual discernment in dealing with the inevitable conflicts that arise in a people traversing the uncharted territory that the wilderness embodies. The Lord would teach us *His way* of handling these conflicts. Sometimes this will involve gentle restoration; other times it will involve harsh correction; still other times it will involve severing of relationship. We learn how to make these judgments in this training ground that we call the wilderness.

Then comes the day when the law is given to Moses atop Mount Sinai. This is a holy place. The people are not to even *touch* the mountain or they will surely die. But Moses is called to the top of the mountain. He is here for forty days, fasting. When the Lord gives the law to Moses, He tells him that that if the people will keep His covenant, they shall be a peculiar people, set apart unto Him. They shall be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. The timing of the giving of the law, early on in the wilderness experience is not coincidental. God is establishing His rule, and He does it quite dramatically with smoke on the mountain for all to see. The Israelites have already come through quite an ordeal at the Red Sea, and God is now establishing His law with them. This He does in the lives of all of His people as they venture into obedience unto God. He is now establishing His law upon our hearts as He trains us to hear His voice in the wilderness. He is calling us to be

true to His covenant with us, and as we do, He is making us into a peculiar people, set apart unto Him. This is not a covenant of stone, but a covenant etched of the Spirit deep within our innermost being.

This is not a covenant that is readily embraced. It is so totally other, and it is one of waiting on the Lord and moving only when the cloud moves. Nothing of our experience in Egypt could have prepared us for this covenant. Indeed, we are prone to the ways of Egypt as we seek to find our way in the wilderness. The children of Israel grew tired of waiting for Moses to come down off the mountain. They reverted to the ways of Egypt as they asked Aaron to make for them a golden calf. The Lord's anger was kindled against them. Lest we be too quick to judge these rebellious Hebrews, are we not prone to look to the arm of the flesh when we do not see the Lord moving as we think He should? Do we not grow weary of waiting on the Lord for *His* commandments to us, and do we not seek to raise up our own idols—goals, visions, ministry attempts—that represent our attempts to make something happen because we think the Lord has forgotten us? Oh, friend, how difficult it is to wait on the Lord. How prone we are to substituting our idols for His Word. And yes, how important it is to submit ourselves to the chastisement of the Lord as he purges us from all of the Egyptian-prone tendencies within us!

The disobedience of the Hebrews was not without grave consequence. The Lord orders that the sons of Levi strap on their swords and commence to kill some 3000 of their own countrymen for this disobedience. There are a couple of things in this incident that are so very relevant for our journey. First, the Lord does a curious thing in the ordering of this slaughter in that it is an order that is in direct contradiction to the law that He has just handed down to Moses that included the command, "Thou shalt not kill." It is most noteworthy that Moses, who had just been given the law, was obviously not bound by that very law! Moses listened to God, and He could hear the voice of the Lord. He was obedient to His voice, even above the law that had just been inscribed in stone. Friends, Moses was not merely a law-giver; even then, he was a forerunner of a new law, a law of the Spirit, that God is intending to inscribe upon the hearts of everyone that He would call His son. The natural thing for Moses to have done would have been to contend with the Lord that to kill 3000 of His people would violate the very law that had just been handed down from Mount Sinai! Moses understood, however, that he lived by *every* word that proceeded from the mouth of God—not just the words etched on stone.

It is also worthy of note that the slaughter of the 3000 was at the hands of their own countrymen. It was, in fact, the priestly tribe, the tribe of Levi, who took the sword to the people. These were the righteous ones. They were the ones who were on the Lord's side. And they were obedient, even to the killing of their own friends and neighbors. The scriptural account says that they took the sword to their brothers, their companions and their neighbors. How painful and difficult this must have been! Those who would be priests must take up the sword today, no less than these, our spiritual ancestors did. The sword that we take up, however, is not a sword of metal. It is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 states that *"...the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* We are called, as sons and priests, to speak forth the Word of the Lord. This Word has both the power to bring life and to bring death (Proverbs 18:21), and it will be as God ordains. This is a most sobering word, and only those who have truly submitted to the chastisement of God, who have come to a place of separation unto God as the Levites of this hour, are qualified to wield this sword.

The Challenge of Moving Forward to the Promised Land

The time comes to explore the promised land of Canaan. Spies are sent out—one from each of the tribes of Israel. They are asked to bring back a report of the land: Is it fruitful? Are the cities fortified? Are their giants in the land? The spies explore the land, and after 40 days of exploring, they return with samples of the abundant fruit of the land. There is a catch, however. The land is full of giants and the cities are fortified with walls. Ten of the twelve spies dwell on the overwhelming danger of the enemy. Despite the fact that the Lord has promised to go before them in every battle, these spies would turn Israel away from entering the Promised Land. Only two—Joshua and Caleb—hold fast to the promise of the Lord and urge the people to move forward because the Lord is on their side.

Many on this wilderness journey have the notion (which is a carryover from our time spent in the halls of organized Christianity) that once we reach the borders of the Promised Land, life will be a bed of roses. The victorious life is one with little challenges, we believe, and if we do face challenges, we easily overcome them. We have been told about the grapes and pomegranates, but somehow we never learned about the giants in the land. I am convinced that we get this idea because we have looked at church leaders, most who have never left Egypt in the first place and who live luxuriously off the spoils of that foreign land. Those

pastors who *have* ventured into a greater life of faith are usually less than transparent with the struggles and battles that they face, and present themselves to their parishioners as having “arrived.” It is a rare pastor in our churches today that truly models the warfare that is entailed in taking the Promised Land. But it is warfare, and there will be personal as well as corporate battles that must be won. The enemy *is* daunting, but the Lord has promised to go before us!

The twelve spies represent the spiritual forerunners of our day. All of them came back with an *accurate* report of what they saw. There *were* giants in the land and they were HUGE! The land *was* flowing with milk and honey, and all of the spies reported it to be so. Only two of the spies, however, came back with a report that they could take the land. They did not base this report on an evaluation of the size of the armies, calculating that the Hebrew army was stronger than the enemy. Oh no! That was the basis for the negative report of the ten. Israel’s army was *not* stronger in the natural. Joshua and Caleb’s report was based on what they saw through eyes of faith. They knew that their God was bigger than any enemy. Alas, however, the people listened to the ten spies with the negative report. It is a report of defeat before the battle ever begins. It is one of resignation—either to life in the wilderness, or worse still, returning to Egypt.

Friends, this is the same report that I hear from so many forerunners of the move of God in our day. God has, in our own lifetimes, poured out His Spirit in some remarkable ways. He has given us a taste of the Promised Land. There have been those who have gone on ahead, seen things in the Spirit of what is in store for us. Most of them have settled for so much less than what God has prepared for them and for those who would receive their report. I am aware of any number of well-known “leaders” in Christian circles who began their journey with a heart of radical obedience to the Lord. These were truly men and women of God. They encountered opposition along the way. They experienced the fierceness of the enemy. There have been very few Joshuas or Calebs coming back with the report of faith. Most have gone the way of Egypt, using Madison Avenue and other marketing strategies to build and maintain a “following.” I have read the histories of several moves of God, and the biographies of individuals involved in these moves. How disappointing it is to see what began as awesome and mighty acts of God among His people, now being harnessed and controlled by these same individuals because they do not trust the sovereign power of God to move in *His* way. It is so much easier to resort to the strategies and techniques of the world. The minute that this happens, the Spirit of God departs.

This is precisely what happened with the children of Israel. When they heard of the anger of God against them because of their unbelief, they attempted to make it happen in their own strength. They went atop a high mountain to launch an attack on the enemy occupying the Promised Land. The account says that neither the ark of the covenant, nor Moses departed the camp with them, however. The presence of the Lord was not with them. They were attempting to make something happen in their own strength, and they were roundly defeated! God had other plans. They would wander another 20 years in the wilderness (they had already wandered for 20 years), so that their wilderness time would be equal in years to the number of days the spies were in Canaan. God was purging them, such that none of those over 20 years of age (except for Joshua and Caleb) would be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Do you see what this experience is foreshadowing? None of the old carnality can enter into the Promised Land! God will keep us in the wilderness until the carnal generation within us has died. Only those whose hearts have been made pure by the refining fires of the wilderness will take this land. This is exactly what took place with the Israelites 20 years later when they crossed the Jordan under the command of Joshua, carrying the ark of the covenant before them, marching mightily into battle against the fortified city of Jericho. These warriors had sanctified themselves, and the ark of the Lord was carried across the Jordan ahead of them. Before going into battle with Jericho, these young men were circumcised, made pure by the cutting away of the foreskin. This is the very circumcision that we, too, must go through. Ours is a circumcision of the heart that is taking place, even as the Lord is cutting out the carnal nature within us. The Promised Land is ours to take. The wilderness is our flint knife that is cutting away all that longs to go back to Egypt. Through this wilderness journey, we are being made pure, and we are learning who we are as sons, that we can go forward in His strength to co-labor with Him in establishing His Kingdom, our Promised Land, on earth as it is in Heaven!

When we understand the scriptural account as a shadow and a type of the journey that the Lord has laid out for us, we can see much more clearly the important function that the wilderness plays in our spiritual life. It is almost a truism to say that the wilderness is for our purification and for our preparation to rule and reign with Christ in His Kingdom. Despite the fact that most of us *know* this is a process that we must go through, almost all of us would wish that we didn't have to. We try to avoid it. But unless we decide to stay in Egypt—which is to say, in the comfortable places that dictate our daily lives and routines—the wilderness is inevitable. The pain that we endure, that feels so evil, is the very thing that is purifying us. It is the flint knife being taken to our heart to strip away

all of the impurity and carnality that we have inherited from old Adam. The sense of lostness is the path to being found by Him who has laid out this very path ahead of us. The path is unseen. There are no roadmaps with reference points to give us a clue as to where we are on the journey. All that we have is a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night to follow. Our trust and confidence must be in Him alone, and until it is, we are not prepared to go against the Canaanites and all of the other giants that inhabit our Promised Land. Until we are stripped of all confidence in our natural abilities, we are not fit to rule and reign with Christ.

Those who have not ventured on this journey, choosing instead to stay in Egypt, do not understand the function of the wilderness. They observe the trials that we are enduring, and wonder what we have done wrong. They are most well-meaning in their counsel to us, but their best counsel can only point us back to Egypt. Many of these are close friends, even family members—some of them immersed in the church system. They know the vocabulary—they may even know the vocabulary of the wilderness. But until they have truly *experienced* the wilderness, casting off all dependence on the systems of Egypt in radical obedience to Christ, their counsel is hollow. We can now only listen to Him as He comes to us through His precious Holy Spirit. Others will speak into us throughout our journey, but we must always be listening to that voice within us that would resonate with what is spoken by others. If it doesn't, we cannot receive the most well-meaning counsel. We are learning to follow the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

We are being changed in this process. We will not always recognize it. In fact, most of the time, we will probably not *feel* as spiritual as we were before we left the land of Egypt. Then, we were acting to please men, and we were made to feel spiritual and righteous—by men. We no longer have these props to bolster our sense of righteousness. God is stripping us of all of this. Know and understand, dear brother and sister, that you are not alone on this journey! There are scores of others, and there is going to come a day when these saints, purified by the journey, come together in the Spirit and experience true body life together, pure and untainted, without spot or wrinkle, as the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ. Right now, you are being prepared to be part of that Bride. It is in the very nature of God's dealings with us, that this be done through the loneliness and the emptying of ourselves, in the wilderness.

CHAPTER 3: ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND

Our journey through the wilderness has been long and arduous. We have experienced times of spiritual thirst and of famine. We have also watched God's miraculous hand of provision. Some of us have been in the wilderness so long that, like Moses during his time of preparation in the desert, we have had to "settle" there by learning to function as wilderness people. This, too, is part of the plan of God to prepare us to be His deliverers in this day. The wilderness is not, however, our ultimate destiny. We are being prepared to enter our land of promise; and even more, to lead God's people willing people into their destiny as well. We have been in preparation to cross spiritual Jordan and enter into the Promised Land.

Anyone who has grown up attending church is very familiar with "the Promised Land." The problem is, what most of us have been taught regarding the Promised Land—how we get there, and even what the Promised Land is—are misconceptions based on a limited and wrong understanding of God's purposes for His creation. Most commonly, perhaps, is the notion that the Promised Land is a place of everlasting bliss, where there are no sorrows or tears. This is an idea promoted in popular spiritual songs, such as "On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand:"

*On Jordan's stormy banks I stand
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land
Where my possessions lie*

Refrain

*I am bound for the Promised Land,
I am bound for the Promise Land
Oh, who will come and go with me,
I am bound for the Promised Land*

*Oh, the transporting, rapturous scene
That rises to my sight
Sweet fields arrayed in living green,
And rivers of delight!*

*O'er all those wide extended plains
Shines one eternal day*

*There God, the Son forever reigns
And scatters night away.*

*No chilling wind nor poisonous breath
Can reach that healthful shore
Where sickness, sorrow, pain and death
Are felt and feared no more*

*When shall I see that happy place
And be forever blessed
When shall I see my Father's face
And in His bosom rest*

*Filled with delight, my raptured soul
Would here no longer stay;
Though Jordan's waves around me roll,
Fearless, I'd launch away*

This representation, at least as it is understood by the carnal mind, is a false and gross misunderstanding of the Promised Land, and one that has been promoted by religious systems today. It basically equates the Promised Land with a celestial place of eternal bliss we call heaven—a heaven that is attained *only after* we die. This is also a view that is promoted by many best-selling books these days on heaven.⁶

In this chapter, I want to strongly make the case that the Promised Land is not a celestial playground or resting place that we enter into when we die (if we have done all the right things while here on earth of course); **the Promised Land is, rather, a state of being or a spiritual reality that is to be apprehended *in this life* by those who are prepared to enter therein. It is, in fact, the *Kingdom of Heaven*, which Jesus said is within us** (Luke 17:21). As with entering a room, entering into a career, or entering into marriage, entering the Promised Land in this life is a choice. Entering that reality, however, requires vision to see it. It is my prayer that the following discussion will help to clarify our vision to more fully comprehend and appreciate the Promised Land that is truly the inheritance that waits for His sons to enter.

⁶ Randy Alcorn's book entitled *Heaven* is one of the top sellers among Christian books still today. More recently, Robert Jeffress' book, *A Place Called Heaven* has become the talk of Christian radio. While these books are top sellers, and probably making their authors quite wealthy, they promote an understanding of heaven that relegates it to some existence in the sweet by and by. The Promised Land—the Kingdom of Heaven—which is truly our inheritance, by contrast, is a very present reality which has been and is being apprehended today by those who are taking up their crosses daily to follow their Lord, fully understanding and accepting the great cost of entering the Kingdom.

In the last chapter, I pointed out that the experience of the Old Testament Israelites is a shadow and a type of spiritual realities today, and is instructive for our own spiritual journey. Most of you reading these pages have spent a good amount of time in the wilderness place that we described in the last chapter. You have been stripped of all manner of the delicacies that you have known in Egypt—whether this be financial and material loss, a besmirched reputation, loss of a marriage, of loved ones due to death, or even a loss of self-respect. This has almost surely been at the hand of God as He has been refining you and preparing you to rule and reign with Him, yes even in this life, as His overcoming and mature sons. He has, in fact, been preparing you for the Promised Land. We continue in this chapter, therefore, to look at the journey of these ancient Hebrews as they crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land, as a picture of our entrance into the land of *our* promise. We want to be very attentive to what the Spirit of God would reveal as to what is in store for us, should we answer the call to go to His place of promise. I urge the reader to listen carefully to whatever truths that God would quicken to your spirit as we consider some of the significant and relevant features of Israel's journey as it applies to our time as *spiritual beings having this earthly experience*.

A New Generation Must Enter the Promised Land

The Israelites had spent forty long years wandering in the wilderness after being delivered from the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt. Theirs had been a miraculous deliverance with signs and wonders accompanying. These miracles included the dividing of the Red Sea for their safe passage across, only to reunite the waters to drown the Egyptian warriors pursuing them; providing a cloud by day and fire by night to guide them through their wilderness journey; and bringing forth water from a rock when they were thirsty, among many others. Despite these demonstrations of God's care, they complained almost continuously.

Then came that decisive hour at Kadesh-barnea, when the Israelites were presented with the vision of the Promised Land. They were to go up and possess the land without fear, because the Lord God would deliver the land into their hands (Deut. 1:20-21). Spies were sent to scout out the land. The spies came back with a good report: that the land was flowing with milk and honey. The spies also reported that the people in the land were strong, *giants* in fact, and that the cities were fortified. All of the spies, excepting Joshua and Caleb, were in fear of the Canaanites, and their report struck fear in the heart of the people, who refused to go up despite God's directive to take the land with His promise that God Himself would go before them.

Because of this response of fear, none of the Israelites who crossed the Red Sea with Moses were allowed to enter the Promised Land with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. Not even Moses! All of them died while wandering yet another 20 years in the desert. Joshua and Caleb were the only two of that generation that God found faithful during this wilderness journey. They saw, believed and entered. Consequently, it would be a *new* generation, those who had been born while on the wilderness journey, who would inherit God's Promised Land. This new generation did not have the experience of being under bondage to an Egyptian Pharaoh. Nor did they witness God's miraculous intervention at the Red Sea. Most of them were too young to remember any of the miracles that were performed. What they *did* remember, no doubt, was the complaining that they heard from their parents.

And so it is that God is preparing a new generation to enter the Promised Land today. Do you see what the experience of these ancient Israelites is foreshadowing? None of the old carnality can enter into the Promised Land! God will keep us in the wilderness until we have truly died to the carnal generation *within us*. Only that which has been made pure by the refining fires of the wilderness will take this land. As we will see, this is exactly what took place with the under-20 generation Israelites years later when they crossed the Jordan under the command of Joshua, carrying the ark of the covenant before them, marching mightily into battle against the fortified city of Jericho. These warriors had sanctified themselves, and the ark of the Lord was carried across the Jordan ahead of them. Before going into battle with Jericho, these young men were circumcised, made pure by the cutting away of the foreskin. This is the very circumcision that we, too, must go through. Ours is a spiritual circumcision of heart that is taking place, even as the Lord is creating in us a spiritual sensitivity to produce a manchild with a purity and glory all of His own. This is discussed more fully below, but I would make the point here that we are being made a new and pure generation, and we are learning who we are as sons, so that we can go forward in His strength to co-labor with Him in birthing and establishing His Kingdom, our Promised Land, on earth as it is in Heaven!

In addition to the generational ties to the old order that God is putting to death *within* each of His sons, the Promised Land is reserved for a new generation corporately as well. God has visited a previous generation with many signs and wonders, just as He did the children of Israel. We have seen the outpouring of His Spirit in manifold ways. We witnessed it in the Great Reformation to which Luther's name has been attached; in the great revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries; and in the outpouring in Wales and at Azusa Street. The Latter Rain

Movement of the mid-twentieth century saw mighty signs and wonders, including supernatural healing. Yet none of this was the Promised Land. These were demonstrations of God's power and His faithfulness to a people He was calling to the Promised Land. *These were the miracles in the desert.* These manifestations were squandered, however, as denominations were formed around exclusive doctrinal positions, as leaders of these movements built great ministries unto themselves, and as these great moves of God were institutionalized, and even marketed as businesses, into human organizational efforts to "contain" them. With few exceptions, these leaders were eager to partake of the grapes and pomegranates that the Promised Land held forth, but like the remaining ten spies, were dissuaded from entering the Promised Land because of fear of the giants that had to be overcome there.

Who are the giants that we face? As we approach this question, we must keep in mind that Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven (the Promised Land) is *within you*. Consider the incredible shift of this spiritual geography: **The Promised Land is WITHIN YOU!** Therefore, we understand that the giants that currently occupy the Promised Land that must be overcome are, first and foremost, the beast within each of us, that scriptures variously refer to as the old Adam, the flesh, the carnal mind, and even the spirit of anti-Christ. These giants manifest as pride, unforgiveness, self-centeredness, and fear and doubt. We must die to all of this! Praise God, we will not destroy these giants, but God Himself goes before us to do this work, just as he promised the children of Israel that He would do for them. I am not suggesting that this will be a cakewalk. The slaying of these giants within us is a fearsome prospect, as the Lord takes us through His refining fires—the very fires of hell—to accomplish this noble purpose. We experience these fires in the context of what we call the cares of life. God uses *all* of the circumstances that we encounter, as the perfect storm He allows for us, to decisively defeat those giants within by His grace and faith. Are we willing to move forward, on to the battlefield, to allow the Lord to rout this enemy of God—our carnal mind, our very flesh—and bring it into submission to His Kingdom purpose? Will we allow the Lord to complete that purifying work in us which will bring us into the perfection of union with Him as sons, being like Him and seeing Him as He is, which will qualify us to enter into and possess the Kingdom of Heaven, our Promised Land? Or will we, like the first generation of wilderness wanderers, slink from the threat that doing battle with these giants poses, and fall short of experiencing that glorious hope? Stated differently, are we Joshuas and Calebs, full of faith that the Lord our God will successfully lead us into battle and rout the

enemy within, or are we one of the ten who are paralyzed by fear at the thought of this enemy and refuse to enter into our land of promise?

The new generation that God is preparing will be a generation of both young people and old people, chronologically. We know any number of saints, up in years, even some who were leaders in various religious denominations and movements, who have abandoned position and the prestige that comes with it, to pursue Christ, to be identified with Him in His sufferings, and have put on *His* righteousness. Despite their age, these are among the new generation qualified to enter the Promised Land. On the other hand, there are others for whom the prospect of God's purifying fires are too ominous and they hold on dearly to that which they have always known. They regard their carnal minds as informed by the Holy Spirit, in many cases not even knowing that their mind is a carnal enemy of God and in need of renewal (Romans 8:7)! This generation has yet to subject their minds to the Spirit of God in order to qualify for entrance.

At the other end of the age spectrum, I have met young people with such a passion for God that nothing will deter them from pursuing Him with abandon. One young man whom God had snatched from a life on a downward spiral was filled with gratitude and awe for His Lord when he told me, "All I want to do is waste my life for the Lord!" He was ready to abandon all, and the last correspondence that I had with him, he *had* abandoned all. This young man is a "new generation" pilgrim who is being made ready to enter into and take possession of the Kingdom of God! For every one of these, we have also known dozens of young ambitious souls who have sold out to the cheap goods that religion and the world have to offer. They are looking for affirmation from their careers, their churches and pastors, and from their success in the world, even and especially the religious world, as the barometer for their spiritual condition. Despite the fact that they are young in years, they are part of the "older generation" who are not prepared to enter the Promised Land.

Friends, regardless of age, the generation that God is preparing to enter the Promised Land will be comprised of only those who are not looking back with longing to the Egypt which enslaved them, but have been willing to leave the lure of that land. They have rejected the bondage of Egyptian religious systems that have sought to control the Spirit of God and usurp His Headship. They have no desire to "own" and control the mighty work that God is doing. They have valiantly done battle with the giants in their land, are dead to their flesh and have been conformed to His death through the sharing of His suffering. Their only desire is to see the Kingdom of God advanced—not some ministry that they

purport to be the Kingdom of God. Those of His royal generation who will enter are determined and free to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit; they are totally abandoned and are single-mindedly loyal to only His agenda. They owe their allegiance and have been attached to Christ as their Head and have learned to submit to the authority of Christ and respond only to His directives. Only these with this precise and absolute Kingdom focus and allegiance are equipped to enter and possess the Promised Land.

Moses and Joshua: Two Different Reigns

It is worthwhile to note that Moses and Joshua were very different types of leaders—differences which represented a difference in function and purpose that God had for their leadership. There are, of course similarities. Both were strong leaders. Both had an acute sensitivity to the voice of God and both had a heart of obedience to that voice. Indeed, Joshua was mentored by Moses and no doubt learned much from Moses' leadership.

We must understand, however, that their respective reigns of leadership were of an entirely different order. Moses was called to lead the children of Israel *out of Egypt*, out of their place of bondage. While the Promised Land was their ultimate destination, it was not for Moses to take them there. He would lead them into the wilderness. He would lead them into, and through, a place of suffering. Here, they would be tested. They would be winnowed. And there would be only two—*only two*—individuals that left Egypt in that generation, found worthy to enter into the Promised Land. Moses himself was not even allowed to enter this place of promise! He was continually confronted with complaining, rebellion, and ungratefulness. And you might say that his leadership was a failure—at least as measured by the standard of taking a generation into the land God had promised to them. Moses' leadership was characterized as much by interceding on behalf of the people, challenging the Lord to withhold His hand of judgment, as it was in speaking forth the voice of the Lord and directing the people in obedience. We might characterize Moses' leadership as *wilderness leadership*. Moses' leadership was one guided and directed by the law that the Lord gave on Mount Sinai. God had called his people out of Egypt and commanded them to live a separate life unto Him by keeping these commandments. They demonstrated that they could not do it, of course, but it was this very order of the law that Moses was called to establish and to lead God's people in throughout their wilderness journey. Indeed, to this very day, Moses is the human representation of the law to the Jewish people.

Joshua, by contrast, exercised a *Promised Land leadership*. The complainers, the rebels, and the rogue stiff-necked people had already been eliminated, dying in the barren wasteland of the wilderness by the time Joshua took the helm. Those in his charge were a new and fresh generation. But while they did not have the guilt of rebellion, neither did they have the living memory of the passing over of the death angel, seeing their eldest sons and brothers spared from the ultimate judgment of the Lord on Egypt. Nor did they have the opportunity to witness the parting of the Red Sea, the miraculous provision of food, or the gushing forth of sweet water from a mammoth rock. To put it simply, Joshua inherited a people who had not personally been part of the mighty moves of God. He was charged to infuse this new generation with a fresh vision of the Promised Land and of the Lord's purpose therein. Joshua was called as a warrior leader, to lead His people to victory over the enemies that would seek to prevent their entry into and possession of the Promised Land. Joshua's task was *not* to establish God's people as a separate people through the Law, but to establish His purpose by possessing the land of Canaan that they understood as the Promised Land.

Moses and Joshua are certainly types that represent the massive shift in the purposes of God among His people. Moses was called to lead a separatist movement, separating the people of God from those cultures around them, including Egypt. They were to remain a separate people. They were not to intermarry with other peoples. They were also given a code of conduct which would distinguish them from all other cultures around them. Moses was called to lead a people into separation and holiness unto the Lord. Joshua's leadership was of a different order. Indeed, God's first word to Joshua after he had assumed the position of leadership was, "*Moses my servant is dead, now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel*" (Joshua 1:2). **Moses my servant is dead, now therefore...ARISE...** The old order is passed away!

A new purpose of God is now being instituted, that being to cross over the Jordan and enter into the Promised Land. Joshua's ascendancy to leadership is a heralding of the coming of Christ, and the Promised Land of the ancient Israelites a foreshadowing of the Kingdom of God that Jesus came to establish. Indeed, the name *Jesus* is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew *Joshua*. Joshua came to bring to pass the ultimate intentions of God for His people Israel by taking and occupying the Promised Land; *so it is that Jesus came to take His separated people to a place of victory over the principalities and powers of this world which currently occupy the land, and through these people, to establish His Kingdom throughout the earth in every generation.*

This new generation under the direction of Jesus through the precious Holy Spirit—our Joshua—is, however, a different kind of people than religion has understood them to be throughout the last 2000 years. They have opened their eyes to the fact that the religious systems which have represented themselves as the “church” have, for the most part, looked to Moses and his contemporary representatives, rather than Joshua (Jesus), to lead them. As a result many of those whom God would separate unto Himself remain in the wilderness (if not still in worldly Egypt). Religion, with all of its institutional infrastructure, still represents the old order of the law and has fine-tuned the law to such an extent that not even Moses would recognize it! It doesn’t matter if this is in the Roman expression or the many varied Protestant expressions: **religion (mystery Babylon) represents the law—not the victory of Christ over the prince of this world!** Oh yes, contemporary Christian religion makes much of the truth that we are saved by grace, through no good works of our own. A careful observation of what happens after one comes into a salvation experience, however, betrays the bent of religious orders toward the order represented by Moses, namely the law. Very quickly, the new convert is expected to “join the church” with all of the requirements that this entails for any particular religious body. They are further expected to become involved in the activities of the local church. There are also doctrinal tenets to which the new believer is expected to affirm, along with a host of behavioral standards to which one must conform, regardless of whether or not these are matters of personal conviction issuing forth from a vital relationship with the Holy Spirit.

I remember so clearly coming back to the Lord after wandering for some 25 years as a prodigal in the far-away land. Oh how glorious that was! I recognized that God had delivered me from a stronghold in my life that I had been powerless to overcome all of those years. I recognized that something had changed within me that only He could have done. *He* had done this awesome thing! This deliverance was no less miraculous than the parting of the Red Sea that delivered the children of Israel from their captors in Egypt. There was now an intimacy with Him and how wonderful it was to commune with Him, spirit to spirit on a daily basis. I was moved to share my testimony, and to speak of the power of God to deliver from the bondage of sin and addiction. I brought my enthusiasm for the Lord to every church meeting I attended, honestly believing that God had powerful and wonderful things in store for those who would hear and receive. While I now recognize, of course, that my zeal had not yet been purified by the refining fires of the Lord, I believe to this day that this was my obedient response to the Lord. I would soon discover that not everyone shared my enthusiasm. The religious

crowd was amused at best and offended at worst. Within weeks, I found myself confronted with expectations for how I was now to conduct myself. I was discouraged from speaking so boldly about what God had done in my life. There were also the usual expectations to get more involved in the life of the church, to pay tithes, eventually to teach a Sunday school class, and sing in the choir. There was also a “spiritual” language that I was now expected to use, and there were certainly places I could not go and things I could no longer do, even though I had no personal conviction about these things. Most of these prohibitions were not spoken, of course. It was just understood that this was not what “good Christians” do. I do not want the reader to misunderstand me here. All of these are good things *if* they are motivated by the life of the Holy Spirit within....BUT...when these deeds are driven by a need to stay in good standing with one’s church or fellow church members, they are nothing more than religious legalism. Oh, the legal requirements that are placed upon those who submit themselves to the authority of the institutional church today! With deep regret, I must report that I succumbed to the yoke of these religious expectations for many years until God called my wife and me out of that system many years ago. He continues to call out others who are listening with attentive spiritual ears.⁷

God is indeed raising up a Joshua-people in our day! This is a people who recognize that the law—all of it, in whatever insidious form that it may take—has been completely fulfilled in Christ, our Joshua. They know that “Moses my servant is now dead. Now therefore ARISE...” This is a people who are gripped by another law, the Law of the Spirit. They have learned to listen to the still small voice of the Spirit in the midst of the clamor of those voices coming from the halls of religious institutions. These called out ones—the true *ecclesia* of God—are heeding the voice of their One True Shepherd. It is *His voice*—not the voice of the “false heads”⁸—that lead those who are so destined into the Promised Land.

⁷ I want the reader to clearly understand that leaving the institutional church is a choice that one can make only when they are moved to do so by the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is not something that is done lightly, or for any motive other than to be obedient to the Lord and from a deep conviction of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, I must assert, as emphatically as I know how, that the system of religious organizations that we call “the church” in Christian circles, in almost every way, is of the old Mosaic order of the law and not of the Joshua order of a conquering generation taking the Kingdom of God by force, overcoming the enemy that still occupies this Promised Land. The reader will even note that I am very careful to avoid using the term “church” to refer to this organization. This is because the biblical word translated “church” is *ecclesia*, which means “called out ones.” I have become convinced that the biblical writers understood themselves to be called out of the religious establishments of their day. I refer the reader to the article, [Ecclesia: Taking Back our Identity](http://www.wordforthebride.net) which can be found on this website (www.wordforthebride.net), for further discussion of our identity as the called out ones of Christ.

⁸ I am introducing the term “false head” here to refer to any person or institution who would raise themselves as an authority over another so as to usurp the authority of the Holy Spirit.

All of Israel Did Not Enter the Promised Land

It is most worthy at this point that we consider the fact that not all of Israel ultimately entered into the Promised Land to possess it. The tribes of Gad and Reuben, and the half tribe of Manasseh made the decision to settle east of the Jordan River in the land of Gilead. They had many cattle, and they saw that this land was good for raising livestock. They made the request of Moses to remain and settle east of the Jordan River (Numbers 32:1-5). Moses was clearly not excited about this request for he knows that without the men of this tribe going to war along with their fellow Israelites, the enemies in the land of Canaan would represent a much more formidable challenge. Moses does, however, ultimately concede to their request on the condition that their fighting men accompany their brethren in the quest to take possession of the Promised Land. They were allowed to build cities in Gilead and settle their wives and children there before going off to war.

This is almost a side note in the annals of Jewish history, but it is most significant for our understanding of what it means to enter and possess the Promised Land. Because we have the mistaken idea that the Promised Land is some blissful existence in a celestial location that we call heaven where we go after we die, many of us do not have a paradigm for the fact that not all who proclaim the name of Christ will enter into the Promised Land. I am not referring here to those who have not come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and whom much of Christianity today has condemned to an eternal hell. God, in His omniscience and mercy, has His plans even for these (and it is not to an eternal place of torment), but this is not what I am addressing here. I refer, rather, to those who love God, acknowledge Jesus as their savior, but who, because of lack of vision and fear of leaving what they know, do not go on to enter into the land of promise. These many-numbered believers, represented here by the tribes of Gad, Reuben and half-tribe of Manasseh, are satisfied to remain outside of God's best that He has prepared for them. They are satisfied because the cost of going on in to Canaan is very great, and once they get there, the battles will be fierce. They remain on the other side of Jordan because they are comfortable where they are and are satisfied to live off the fat of the circumstances they currently find themselves in. They have not gone back to Egypt, but neither have they gone on to possess the Promised Land. They prefer to stay in the comfort of that which they can see. They have no spiritual eyes to see the greater good that waits for them in the Promised Land or to behold the greater thing that God has for those who will trust Him with their very lives. These are those whose wilderness experience has

not yet fully prepared them to enter on into the land of promise—a land which requires that we walk, not by *sight*, but by *faith*.

This does *not* mean that God loves them any less! Just as God loved the tribes of Gad and Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and provided for them in the land of Gilead, so does He love those who make the decision to remain in spiritual Gilead. Nor are these trans-Jordan tribes turning back to Egypt. They have heard the call to leave Egypt, including for many, leaving the organized churches from which they came. They are, nevertheless, still walking by *sight*. And so, after leaving the church, they seek out home groups, are seduced into following after ministries that proclaim truths *about* the Promised Land; and some even attempt successfully or not, to form such ministries. But let's be clear: these do not taste of the bitter gall that comes with fully taking up one's cross, daily, having submitted to their own death to be conformed to His. They do not understand the agony that Promised Land-bound saints experience in their lives, and indeed, often make very unspiritual judgments about them. Because they are unwilling to fully partake in the Lord's suffering, they will never share in His glory. While God loves these and blesses them, they will never taste of the Promised Land as victors who are destined to rule and reign in that land.

Spying Out Jericho

Before even crossing the Jordan, Joshua sent out two spies into the city of Jericho. Jericho was a walled city, sitting virtually on the banks of the Jordan. It would have to be conquered before the Israelites would ever be able to occupy the Promised Land. Jericho and its walls represented a formidable challenge to the children of Israel. Its walls prevented them from seeing into the city, to assess the strength of its people or to even size up the physical challenges that would present themselves to the Israelites as they marched in to take over the city. Hence, it was necessary to spy out this city.

I believe that the spies that Joshua chose were carefully selected as trustworthy men who would give a true report. Any experienced military man knows that true and accurate intelligence is critical to success in war. The scripture is not clear as to Joshua's specific motive in sending the spies. The land of Canaan had already been spied upon some 20 years earlier, and from this foray, the Israelites generally knew what was before them. Possibly Joshua was merely wanting to get a report on the physical layout of the city of Jericho; or maybe he wanted to know something about the people of the city. Scripture is silent as to his motive. But the scripture would seem to suggest that *God's* purpose was to provide a basis for confidence that they would be victorious over this enemy. The spies

snuck into the city and were given succor by the prostitute Rahab. She gave them protection when the men of Jericho learned that they had breached the wall of the city. The significant thing that these spies learned, however, is that the city of Jericho was in terror of the Israelites. This was invaluable information because it was a confirmation that the Lord was going before them, even to the point of striking fear in the hearts of their enemies. What a confidence God was now building in His people in preparation for their first assault on the enemy currently in possession of the land that was promised to them.

So it is, that as God is readying us to take possession of that land that He has prepared for us, He has given us forerunners (spies) who have gone before and have seen and tasted of what lies ahead for us. Those to whom we look for this true and accurate report of what lies ahead must be faithful witnesses of that which God has in store. We must not be lulled into a false sense of material well-being peddled by the merchants of prosperity that consume so much of Christian television and takes up so much shelf space at Christian bookstores; neither must we be horrified or discouraged at the messages of doom and gloom prophets who fill up the other end of Christian bookstore shelves and who are preying upon the fears of a generation who simply cannot see the sovereignty of God in all that is taking place in our world today. A *true* report by a true and faithful witness will bear witness that, yes, there is indeed an enemy that inhabits this land of promise that Jesus boldly called the Kingdom of Heaven. Such a witness will also proclaim that this land does not belong to that enemy; it belongs to God and His sons. The enemy is no match for that bold and fearless army that God has been preparing throughout its wilderness journey by emptying each member of all self-confidence and establishing Himself as their source of confidence. The true report of the spies, those faithful forerunners who have blazed the trail before us, is that we can go forth in the full confidence that God is going before us and that every enemy *will* be defeated! I would urge each and every one reading these lines to listen closely to your spirit as you read and listen to the many messages that would barrage you in our day. Are you left with a sense of fear? Do the messages that you read and hear leave you with a sense of obligation imposed upon you by the writer or speaker. If this is the nature of your experience you can be sure that this is not a true witness. God does not use a spirit of fear to motivate His children and those who would be His sons (1 John 4:18). Unlike the many preachers in the land of Egypt, He does not impose upon us a spirit of guilt and obligation to persuade us to slavishly “make bricks” for His kingdom. He woos us by the gentle voice of His spirit as it connects with ours. Those who have fully surrendered their wills to His will find that the true report of those whom He

is sending to spy out your Jericho will resonate with your spirit. It will capture you, leaving you with a sense of faith that God is going before and that *nothing* is taking place but what He has known, ordained, and even planned for these events no matter how discouraging they may seem. Let us be discerning in what we take in, and meditate on those things which stir us on to faith and obedience to Christ.

Crossing the Jordan

Israel was encamped on the east bank of the Jordan River at a place called Shittim as they were preparing to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. Shittim is significant in the life of Israel, as it was here, years earlier, that the Hebrew men committed whoredom with the Moabite women, in direct disobedience to the Lord's command. It was also here that Israel joined itself with Baal-peor which greatly kindled the anger of the Lord against them (Numbers 25:1-3). It is, therefore, significant that Shittim would be the launching site for Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. The Lord God of Israel would redeem even Israel's disobedience for His ultimate purpose. Nothing is wasted with God—not even our disobedience! And His punishment is *always* for His redemptive purpose of bringing His people to the ultimate place of promise that He has prepared for them.

The day finally arrived when the children of Israel would pass over the Jordan River. They were commanded to wait until they saw the Ark of the Covenant, the very presence of the Lord, carried by the priests, before they began to move. The Israelites had been trained in the wilderness to wait for the cloud by day and fire by night—also the tangible presence of the Lord—before they moved. If that cloud (or fire) did not move, *they* were not to move. These trans-Jordan migrants were told to keep a distance of at least two thousand cubits between themselves and the Ark of the Covenant so that they could behold clearly the presence of the Lord. This place across the Jordan was a place that they had never been before. They could not depend upon their own senses or abilities to tell them where to go. It was of critical importance that they keep the Ark (presence of the Lord) clearly before them as they crossed.

This is possibly the most important principle that must be learned by those who are of the Joshua Company, those who move and live by the Spirit of God. This company, does not have the luxury (bondage, really) of depending upon the written law or religious traditions to be their guide. They cannot depend upon the traditions of men passed down through hundreds of years of church history. Neither can they find security any longer in the predictable programs, organization and ecclesiastical structure of the institutional church, even

(especially) in a charismatic leader. Their authority is now the very Word of the Lord, spoken and demonstrated to them, and on this and this alone they most stand. They are trained to listen with spiritual ears and see with spiritual eyes what the Spirit is saying and doing, and only then do they move. This is new and unfamiliar territory—indeed, a new wineskin—this Promised Land which is the Kingdom of God. The old church order cannot guide us in this new and challenging place to which God is taking us. God is, however, faithful, and in *every* generation demonstrates His faithfulness. Our God knows exactly what we need to equip us with an overcoming faith to follow the Ark of the presence of the Lord wherever He is leading us. Praise His name!

A Stone Monument

The crossing of the Jordan River represented the entrance into the Promised Land. It is not insignificant that the Israelites crossed the Jordan at the time of year when it was at its highest level. The Lord God of Israel had another miracle to perform for this second generation of Israelites, just as He did for the first generation at the Red Sea some 40 years earlier. This generation was born in the wilderness and had not seen the miracle-working hand of God as did their parents. It was necessary that they did see it, however, because there would be many battles to come that would require that they trust in the Lord their God for the victory. Indeed, such a battle was just ahead at Jericho. And so it was that God held back the waters of the Jordan so that His people could march across on dry land. Remembering God's faithfulness to these people at the Jordan would be the key to the courage they would need. There were giants in the land, and the enemy would often seem overwhelming. God would require things of them that they would not always understand, such as marching around Jericho seven times and then on the seventh time, blowing their trumpets. What kind of warfare is that? But trust in God they must. So a stone monument was ordered so that they would never forget God's faithfulness to them (Joshua 4).

This was not the first time, of course, that God ordered such a remembrance, for such monuments were erected frequently throughout the Old Testament. These remembrances were instituted to establish trust through many difficult days ahead. God is still intervening in the life of His people today. Individually and corporately, if we have eyes to see, the hand of God is dramatically evident in the challenges that we have faced. There are occasions when we, too, are instructed to erect monuments as a remembrance of what God has done. These are not stone monuments located on the geographical site of a physical battle or event that has taken place. God has a way of ordering the building of remembrances

nevertheless. It may be that, like Israel (Jacob) of old, we are left with physical conditions that remind us of God's faithful dealings with us. There may be material objects that remind us of God's provision through impossible circumstances. Often, as is the case with me, it is a memory indelibly etched in our consciousness, and reinforced by many opportunities that the Lord gives us to share this experience with others. In all of the many ways that God erects the monuments in our lives, it is for the purpose of remembering and establishing the history of His faithfulness, and thereby giving us faith and courage to persevere through difficult situations and battles ahead.

I want to add here a word of caution that we not create *idols* of these monuments or past interventions of God. It is so very easy to longingly look back to the last great work of God in our lives, individually or corporately, and establish that experience as the prototype for what God will do in the future. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard sincere believers talk about the "good old days" when God was moving in their midst. They were looking for that kind of move of God again. Many times God does move, or wants to move, but it is in a fresh way and these very people cannot even recognize it because it doesn't look like the last "revival" of which they were a part. I was once part of a small prayer group of men who had been meeting every week at five o'clock on Tuesday mornings for some 15 years praying for revival. God's spirit began to move one day in that little church, but these very men did not see it because it did not look like the last move of God that they had witnessed. In fact, they sought to undermine this move because *they* were not on the platform when it was taking place. It has been said that the greatest opposition to revival is from those who were part of the last revival. This is because that last revival became an idolatrous memorial that would be used as a template from which to (attempt to) conform all future moves of God. God will not be constrained in this way. Understood properly, past experiences of God's moving among His people are signs and remembrances of His faithfulness. We must incline our hearts toward *Him*, trust Him in the dry seasons, emboldened to keep persevering as we remember His past faithfulness, and be ready to lay down everything we *thought* we knew about God and His ways so that we can respond faithfully as He breathes a fresh and living Word for this day. This unshakeable faith in God's faithfulness despite appearances is the ultimate purpose of the monuments which God erects in our lives and which He asks us to remember.

Circumcision at Gilgal

Israel has now entered the Promised Land, but there is one final act of preparation that must take place before the people of God are positioned to take possession of that Land. The men must be circumcised. All of the men coming out of Egypt had been circumcised, in keeping with God's covenant with Abraham. During the 40 years in the wilderness, however, the rite of circumcision had not been practiced, and so those born during the years of wandering had not yet had the knife taken to their foreskin. This painful ordeal was necessary, for, by covenant between God and Abraham, this was what set Abraham's seed apart from those cultures around them. God's people were a distinctive and peculiar people, and this act of circumcision signified their election as God's chosen ones. It was, of course, a painful rite, and would require a time of respite until they were whole enough to engage the battles ahead.

That which took place at Gilgal is also a shadow and type of what must take place amongst the people of God today. This is not a physical circumcision, of course, nor is this circumcision restricted to those who are born into male bodies. Indeed, Paul declares to believers in Galatia that

...in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love (Gal 5:6; NKJV).

Paul has, in fact, just urged the Galatian believers *not* to allow themselves to be circumcised!

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:1-4; NKJV).

Circumcision had become a matter of merely keeping the law, and Paul was loudly declaring that if the Galatians allowed themselves to be circumcised, they were indebted to keep the entire law—a feat that no one could accomplish in Paul's day or in ours. The need for such was abolished at the cross, and to insist on the necessity of keeping this regulation, or any other, is to make a mockery of the cross.

There is, however, a circumcision of the heart that is foreshadowed by the covenant of circumcision that God established with His people Israel.

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God (Romans 2:28-29; NKJV).

God is preparing a people with circumcised hearts, to storm the gates of hell and take down every stronghold against the Kingdom of God in our day! Like the circumcision of the flesh, this is a painful process, as God exchanges our hearts of stone for hearts of flesh. This requires that He strip away all of the strongholds within *us* that would hinder our communion with Him. This is how He separates us unto Himself as a special and peculiar people. Through this painful process, God is re-creating a people in His very image, who have surrendered every other loyalty, and who look unto Christ alone as the Head of His body! Those who have come this far as to cross the Jordan came to this point only by going through the wilderness. Indeed, it is the wilderness experience, as we persevere through it, that accomplishes this circumcision process within each of us. This circumcision at Gilgal but symbolized that work that God had been doing in the hearts and lives of these men who were about to take up the sword against Jericho. As we have come through the wilderness experience, and have allowed our hearts to be circumcised at Gilgal, we have been set aside for the work of partnering with Jesus our elder brother to bring the Kingdom of Heaven—our Promised Land—here on earth. What an incredible and awesome privilege that is ours!

On to Possess the Promised Land

The Israelites have crossed the Jordan and they have entered into the Promised Land. All is now peace and rest, perhaps playing harps and walking on streets of gold, right? Hardly! There would be many battles ahead as enemy forces were entrenched throughout Israel's Promised Land. There would be many tests of obedience that Israel would face, and some of these tests they would not pass with flying colors. Entering the Promised Land merely *positioned* the children of Israel to take possession of it. They could see it now, close up; they could taste of the fruit of that land. If they were going to take possession of it and claim it as their own, however, they must conquer the enemy that currently occupied and held control. Successfully conquering the enemy would require a level of obedience to the Lord and to their commander Joshua beyond the faithfulness of their fathers in the wilderness. It would require a singleness of vision and total commitment to the vision birthed some 400 years earlier in the covenant

between God and Abraham. These Israelites would, each one, lay down their very lives as they partnered with the Lord their God to take possession of this land of promise.

Our Promised Land will require no less of us. Religious leaders and their various media of communication in our day have promulgated the idea that if we will only accept and trust in Jesus as savior, and serve Him as diligently as we can while living a moral lifestyle (keep the Mosaic law), we will then be rewarded with eternal bliss in our Promised Land that they call heaven. I find nothing in scripture that supports such a view.

Jesus had many things to say about the kingdom of heaven. None of what He had to say even remotely resembled the depictions that are propagated from so many pulpits throughout America and elsewhere of flitting about on cumulous clouds, playing harps, sitting around huge banquet tables eating Kentucky Fried Chicken or any of the other popular portrayals of heaven as a gathering place of saints after they die. Let us be very clear—*Jesus suggested otherwise:*

- the kingdom of heaven does not come by observation, but is *within you* (Luke 17:21);
- the kingdom of heaven is *at hand* (not where we go when we die) (Matt. 4:17);
- the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are persecuted (Matt. 5:10);
- there would be some standing beside him who would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God present with power (Mark 9:1);
- the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent (passionate) men take it by force (Matt. 11:12).

Those who would enter, and eventually possess the Promised Land are those who are being prepared to rule and reign with Christ. They are part of that great royal priesthood spoken of in the letter to the Hebrews.⁹ It is not a fanciful pie in the sky after we die. Heavens no! It is, rather, the government of God established by Him within those who realize that His Kingdom that Jesus declared is “within” and “at hand” upon the earth right NOW! This Kingdom is taken by force by passionate men and women who have counted the cost, crossed the Jordan,

⁹ I would encourage the reader to read the series by J. Preston Eby entitled *The Royal Priesthood*. It is available free of charge through the [Kingdom Bible Studies](#) link on this website. An [audio version](#) of this series is available on the audio/video page of this website (www.wordforthebride.net).

carried their cross faithfully, and have not stained their garments by “settling.” They are prepared to inherit and possess their Promised Land. It is for us, as it was for the Israelites of old, a possession that must be fought for, apprehended, and possessed. Furthermore, it is one thing to *enter* the kingdom of heaven, whereby we can see and taste the good things that God has prepared for those who serve Him; it is quite another to *take possession* of this land of promise. Taking possession requires doing battle with and defeating the enemies that occupy this reality that has been promised to us. We look closer at that which is required of taking possession of our Promised Land next.

CHAPTER 4: POSSESSING THE PROMISED LAND

Let us briefly recap the experience of the Israelites to this point. They had spent forty long years wandering in the wilderness after being delivered from the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt. Theirs had been a miraculous deliverance with signs and wonders accompanying. These miracles included the dividing of the Red Sea for their safe passage across, only to close the waters, thereby drowning the Egyptian warriors who pursued them; providing a cloud by day and fire by night to guide them through their wilderness journey; and bringing forth water from a rock, among many others. Despite these demonstrations of God's care, they complained almost continuously.

There then came that decisive hour at Kadesh-barnea, when the Israelites were presented with the vision of the Promised Land. They were to go up and possess the land without fear, because the Lord God would deliver the land into their hands (Deut. 1:20-21). Spies were sent to scout out the land and they came back with a good report: that the land was flowing with milk and honey. The spies also reported that the people in the land were strong, GIANTS in fact, and that the cities were fortified. All of the spies, excepting Joshua and Caleb, were in fear of the Canaanites, and their report struck fear in the heart of the people, who refused to go up despite God's directive to take the land and His promise that He would go before them. God's anger was kindled because of this, and he threatened to destroy that generation then and there. Moses interceded on behalf of the Israelites and God withheld his hand of judgment at that time. God did decree, however, that none of that generation, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, would enter into the Promised Land. The result was that the Israelites would spend much longer in the wilderness than necessary. This journey, and its significance as a shadow and type of our own spiritual sojourn has been discussed in Chapter 2.

The second generation, however, did enter the Promised Land, once again through the demonstration of the power of God when He held back the waters of the Jordan. Once across, they built a stone monument to memorialize God's mighty hand. Chapter 3 discusses the significance of this experience as a foreshadowing of our own Promised Land entry. It is not enough, however, to merely *enter into* the Promised Land. We know that there is an enemy that inhabits this land and he comes in many forms.

There is a false and greatly detrimental understanding of the Promised Land promoted by the church system today, which basically equates the Promised Land with Heaven—a heaven that is attained only after we die. This is a most detrimental understanding because it does not prepare God’s people for the stark reality of the battles that face us upon entering the Promised Land, nor for the glorious inheritance that is truly ours. The Promised Land of *our* possession is something far more challenging and also more glorious than the rather sterile depictions promoted of “heaven” by corporate Christianity today. My fellow sojourner—the Promised Land—which in New Testament terms is the Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Heaven—*must be conquered and possessed!* Jesus said, “*And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*” (Matthew 11:12).

God’s Preparation for Possessing the Promised Land

As we once again consider the remarkable story of our God taking His chosen people from Egypt to Canaan, we see that he began preparing the Israelites for possessing the Promised Land while Moses was still in command. This preparation began many years before they crossed the Jordan, while they were still in the wilderness; and then more instructions as they were encamped on the plains of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho. During their time of wandering He gave Moses some very specific instructions as to what the children of Israel were to do in order to possess the Promised Land; and once across, the Lord gave Joshua more directives. These preparations are beneficial for us as we come to possess the Kingdom of God, the land of promise that Jesus told us has been prepared for us.

Spying Out the Land

Long before Israel crossed the Jordan River at Gilgal, the Lord instructed Moses to send twelve spies into the land of Canaan, which was their Promised Land. Three kinds of information were brought back by these intelligence gatherers. The first had to do with the bounty of this land, “*whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein or not*” (Numbers 13:20). Second, they were to report as to the nature of the inhabitants, whether they be strong or weak. Finally, they were to assess the nature of the dwelling places—whether they lived in tents or in fortified cities.

So the spies scouted out the land for 40 days. The number 40 is both fascinating and significant. As was discussed in Chapter 2, we also observe that after the children of Israel entered the wilderness, Moses spent 40 days atop Mt. Sinai

without food or water waiting upon the Lord to write upon the tablets the second time. Elsewhere, we see Noah and his family shut up in the ark for 40 days while God sent a flood to kill every living thing which was not contained in the ark. The prophet Ezekiel lay on his side 40 days for Israel's sins. These are but a few of the many instances of the number 40 in scripture. This number is seen many times in scripture and it is almost always used in connection with experiences or events that involve testing and trial or cleansing and purging. This would, indeed, be the test of a lifetime for the children of Israel.

The spy's report contained both an encouragement and a warning. The land was bountiful, flowing with milk and honey, as evidenced by huge clusters of grapes, pomegranates and figs. But beware! The people who inhabit the land are giants, and they live in fortified cities. We know the rest of the story. The fear of the inhabitants dominated their report (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) and they were controlled by fear. They did not believe they could conquer this enemy and the people chose to believe this bad report. They were tested and they failed to respond in faith. They would stay in the wilderness another 20 years until that entire generation would die.

God has also been sending out His spies in our day. These spies are the forerunners of that which God is preparing to do. Their report came back to us at Azusa Street just after the turn of the twentieth century when Pentecost rained down on a hungry people; and then in the 1940's and 1950's in what has come to be called "the Latter Rain Outpouring." These messengers, and the many who have come after, have tasted of the Kingdom and have brought back a positive report of the things that God has in store for us. Many have embraced this message but have turned a deaf ear to the other part of this message. *There are giants in the land!* These "name it and claim it" proselytizers of prosperity have held out a promise to multitudes that they can have whatever their soulish heart desires if only they have enough faith. Sadly, they have not warned of the giants in the land. They have failed to alert their followers to the refining and purging of the giants within that would set about to defeat them in their quest to possess this land of promise. Moreover, because the preoccupation of these prophets of prosperity seems to always be on material blessing, their followers remain blind to the true riches that are theirs to possess as they drive out and defeat the enemy that currently occupies their land of promise. While God is faithful in bringing material provision, only as the soulish forces within are conquered do we discover the true riches that God has in store for us, our *true* Promised Land! These are spiritual riches that give us peace in the midst of trial and testing; joy in the face of tragedy; overcoming power and authority in the face of persecution

and opposition. Just as the giants in the land are a shadow and type of the spiritual forces aligned against our quest to enter and possess the Kingdom of Heaven, so the pomegranates and grapes symbolize the spiritual riches that are prepared for us.

There have been Joshuas and Calebs, however—among whom are those we have linked to this website¹⁰—who have been faithful to bring back a full report. Indeed, the land *is* flowing with milk and honey. Moreover, God’s true prophets in our day recognize that there is an enemy that must be defeated. They understand that the enemy is, first and foremost, within each of us. That formidable enemy must be defeated. Anyone who honestly examines themselves will find a daunting foe. Many, like the children of Israel, are overwhelmed by this foe. They have heard the prosperity message of milk and honey, but when they encounter the obstacles to possessing this land, they are overwhelmed and discouraged, and even told that the reason for their failure is that they do not have enough faith. Oh that these charlatans who peddle this one-sided kingdom message would be exposed for who they are! Friend, the obstacles that you encounter are nothing more than God’s providential orchestration of circumstances to root out the enemy within you that would blind you from the true riches God has in store for you, and that would deter you from taking possession of them! God must have a people who are totally surrendered to him; a people within whom the old Adam has been dealt a death blow. This is a victorious people in the face of battle. The good news is that, just as with the children of Israel, it is the Lord’s battle to be fought within each of us. He will accomplish and bring to completion that good work which He has begun. Your enemy may be an addiction that you have been powerless to conquer with all of your best efforts and aides; I give testimony to the conquering power of Christ to overcome this enemy. Your enemy may be a flaring temper that has repeatedly gotten you in trouble and over which you seem to have no control; surrender this enemy to the Lord and give Him permission to defeat this giant in *His* time. Your enemy may be fear—whether over health, finances or any other circumstance; know that perfect love casts out all fear, and He is Perfect Love. Your only responsibility as a maturing son is to not resist His chastening and purging. He will bring to completion that which He has begun!

As we then move forth and encounter the enemy that would come against us from without, we must quickly learn that this, too, is the Lord’s battle and He goes before us. We must not be deterred by the size of the enemy—without or within.

¹⁰ For those reading the print version of this book, the website is www.wordforthebride.net.

We must also know that we will never defeat that enemy in our own strength. We must know the size of our God and that He, in fact, has *already* delivered the death blow to that enemy on Calvary. It is in this knowledge that we can march confidently forward in the battles ahead.

Drive Out the Inhabitants of the Land

After wandering in the wilderness another 20 years after they rebelled in fear to the spies report, the Lord brought the children of Israel to the plains of Moab, postured to cross the Jordan and enter into the Promised Land. There the Lord gave Moses more instructions for possessing the land once entered. First, He told Moses most emphatically that they were to drive out all the inhabitants of the land, to destroy their pictures and molten images and to tear down all of their high places (Numbers 33:52-53). He further made it very clear as to what the consequences would be if they failed to do this: *“But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass that those which ye let remain in them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell”* (Numbers 33:55). Anyone who has read the story of the Old Testament Israelites is very aware that this is exactly what happened because they failed to be completely obedient to the Lord here.

There is a serious lesson in the experience of our Hebrew forefathers for those of us destined to enter and possess the land of promise that the Lord has prepared for us today. Contrary to what many think, and contrary to what the church system has taught—at least implicitly—the Kingdom of God is at present occupied by enemy forces. Paul makes this very clear when he writes to the Ephesian believers:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:10-12; NKJV).

Please note that these are spiritual hosts of wickedness *in the heavenly places*. These hosts occupy *our place of destiny!* However, just as God promised the ancient Israelites that He would go before them and that He would fight their battles, we receive the same promise. Once again, God’s apostle to the Gentiles extends to us the assurance of our victory:

Yet in all these things (tribulation, distress, persecution, nakedness, famine, peril, sword) we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:37-39; NKJV).

There is an enemy that must be conquered, and *will* be conquered through the power of the Spirit as we submit our wills to align with His completely. This enemy may come to us from without, in the form of persecution, extreme financial distress (nakedness and famine), health and physical problems or a myriad of other forms. We are declared to be conquerors, because greater is He that is within us than He who is in the world (1 John 4:4). We conquer, not by natural means but by spiritual as we live and move and have our being in Christ. More often, the enemy to be conquered is within ourselves. Old Adam has his roots still within us. We respond with fleshly anger when our spouse or business partner fails to act as we believe they should. We are secretly jealous of our neighbor's lifestyle that allows them to seemingly enjoy the fruits of the good life without a care in the world. Circumstances arise which reveal that we have been holding a grudge against a friend or sibling and unforgiveness has ruled our relationship with them. All of these are manifestations of a deadly enemy within that must be conquered as we march forward to take the Kingdom of God by force (Matthew 11:12).

We so typically become discouraged when we encounter these enemies—those external, but especially those internal. We feel like failures, even believing that these besetting character issues have disqualified us from even entering the Promised Land of God's Kingdom. Dear friend, understand that these circumstances are orchestrated by God Himself! Every time that we encounter persecution and difficult circumstances, every time that we are confronted with our own unredeemed Adamic nature, the enemy that is entrenched in our land of promise is thereby exposed, and therefore made vulnerable to the sword of His conquering Spirit. It is the place of our vulnerability as well, of course, but necessary so that the Lord can most effectively conquer that particular giant within.

He will not allow a single enemy to remain hidden. As we cooperate with Him in this routing of the enemy currently occupying our Canaan, we cannot leave *any* offense unforgiven. We cannot allow *any* ungodly anger to masquerade as

righteous and remain within us. Any enemy that is allowed to remain in the land will surely come back to vex us, as I'm sure just about every single person reading these lines has experienced. Let me be very clear here: We cannot defeat these enemies. It is only as we humble ourselves before the Lord, submit our will to His and patiently wait for Him to conquer the deadly enemy within and without, responding only in obedience and in accordance with what *He* is doing that we will be victorious over the enemy entrenched in the land. Jesus told us that in the midst of persecution, "*In your patience, possess ye your souls*" (Luke 21:19). The word for patience here is *hypomoné* which speaks of one who is not swerved from his purpose or commitment to his calling by even the greatest of testings and trials. And so it is, as we set our hearts to simply wait on He who has overcome the world with resolve to trust Him in the midst of our many afflictions, our Promised Land—that land within which is now our battlefield (the soul)—is, according to our Lord, possessed! Be of good cheer!

Defining the Boundaries

God defined in great detail and with great specificity the boundaries of the land that He was giving to the Israelites. A large part of chapter 34 of the book of Numbers is devoted to this description. It was obviously important to God that His people know precisely the boundaries of the Promised Land! They were to possess all of it; at the same time, any attempt to take land that was beyond these borders was not authorized or approved by God, and He would not bless any attempt to go beyond His divinely authorized boundaries.

The Lord would have us know the boundaries of our land of promise as well. Over the centuries God has been revealing more and more of the nature and magnitude of the Kingdom of God to those with spiritual eyes to see and ears to hear. We have come to understand, with Luther, that the Kingdom of God is apprehended by faith, not by dead works or penance. We have come to experience, with the Wesleys and others such as George Fox, the inner fire and light of God's presence; that there is an *experience and communion* with God that is personal. God's outpouring at Azusa Street was a further revealing of the power of God to transform and to bring down strongholds. More recently, the Latter Rain outpouring revealed as never before the destiny of the Sons of God to rule and reign with him in the ages to come.

There are two problems that we have had in our coming to terms with the parameters of the Kingdom that God has prepared for us. The greatest problem which has plagued the church is in believing that the last great revelation of God is all that there is. There are even those who believe that divine revelation ceased

with chapter 22 of the book of Revelation! This mindset has resulted in an impotency in the life of God's people and has kept them as babes, feeding mindlessly (and spiritlessly) on watered down interpretations of scripture and past dealings of God by the self-appointed guardians of divine knowledge and wisdom (the preachers and theologians). There is no room for a fresh word from the Lord when we are stuck in past moves of God, and rely on interpretations of these moves that come from the carnal mind of man. The horizons of our spiritual vision have become stunted as we can see nothing beyond what God has done or revealed to past generations. Those who would be so bold as to proclaim a new and fresh revelation are even called heretics because their word does not conform to the exegetic masterpieces of intellectually (carnally) motivated theologians. We are at the dawn of a new day. God is looking for a people who have ears to hear the fresh Word that He is speaking forth NOW, in this day!

The other mistake that has been made is when overly zealous men and women of God go beyond what God has authorized them to say and do. There have been many false doctrines promoted, and ministries that would fleece the people of God that have gone forth from those who *pretend* that they know the mind of God, and then arrogantly proceed to rule over others. Jesus said that such was not to be the way in which His true followers operated (Luke 22:25). These wolves in sheep's clothing *may* have heard a "word from the Lord," but because they have not fully surrendered to Our God's refining fires in the wilderness of preparation, these have filtered any such word through their own carnal minds and fleshly ambitions, making it their own, and then have often attempted to sell it for profit. They have made claims and assumed an authority that they simply do not have. I am quite convinced that it is because of the excesses of these zealous entrepreneurs disguised as holy men/women or angels of light, that much of the church world turns a deaf ear to any fresh word that the Lord may truly be speaking in our day. The truth is that God *is* speaking today, and He is continuing to reveal the glories of His Kingdom which He has prepared for those with spiritual eyes to see and ears to hear. Great discernment is required as we hear *our* Numbers 34 being spoken to us.

Circumcision at Gilgal

After Israel entered the Promised Land, there was one final act of preparation that had to take place before the people of God were positioned to take possession of that Land. The men must be circumcised. All of the men coming out of Egypt had been circumcised, in keeping with God's covenant with Abraham. During the 40 years in the wilderness, however, the rite of circumcision

had not been practiced, and so those born during the years of wandering had not yet had the knife taken to their foreskin. This painful ordeal was necessary, for, by covenant between God and Abraham, this was what set Abraham's seed apart from those cultures around them. God's people were a distinctive and peculiar people, and this act of circumcision signified their election as God's chosen ones.

That which took place at Gilgal is also a shadow and type of what must take place amongst the people of God today. God is preparing a people today to storm the gates of hell and take down every stronghold against the Kingdom of God in our day by circumcising our *hearts*. Like the circumcision of the flesh, this is a painful process, as God must strip away all of the strongholds within *us* that would hinder our communion with Him. God must essentially exchange our hearts of stone for hearts of flesh. He must do this in order to sensitize us to *His* heart and make us ready for carrying His heart as His priests and kings. This is how He separates us unto Himself as a special and peculiar people. As Paul so clearly states, this is not a process that will be recognized by or receive the praise of men (Romans 2:28-29). This circumcision of the heart will humble us before men as God strips us of all that we and others have deemed as good within ourselves. It is, nevertheless, our flesh, and this foreskin must be removed. Through this painful process, God is re-creating a people in His very image, who have surrendered every other loyalty unto Him and who look unto Christ alone as the Head of all they are and do. As our hearts are being circumcised, we are being set aside for the work of partnering with Jesus our elder brother to establish the Kingdom of Heaven—our Promised Land—here on earth. What an incredible and awesome privilege that is ours!

Battles to be Fought

Israel would not march into Canaan and have a table spread before them, welcoming them as the new owners of this small but significant piece of real estate at the juncture of three continents. Quite to the contrary, they would have to go to war to take this land. There would be a total of 31 kings defeated *after* Israel crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land (Joshua 12:7-24). This isn't even counting the kingdoms that were defeated under the leadership of Moses on the other side of the Jordan!

Many people have the mistaken notion that the Promised Land is a place of blissful rest and relaxation that the believer has somehow "earned"—whether this has been earned by living righteously, doing good works, or even giving up all of their material possessions. All too many even believe that simply "asking Jesus into their hearts" is all that is required to earn their piece of celestial real estate,

at least if they remain diligent in this life to maintain their Christian lifestyle as defined by the guardians of whatever church they attend. Heaven has almost become some sort of Olympic gold medal (or silver or bronze, depending on whether you aspire to a mansion next to Jesus, or merely a wee cabin just inside the pearly gates) conferred upon those who “run the race” effectively. Jesus painted quite a different picture. He said, “*And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*” (Matthew 11:12; NKJV).

What? Did Jesus mean that we were going to have to storm the pearly gates after we enter the grave, even taking out St. Peter, the guardian of those gates? This would be just about the only conclusion to one who has a view of heaven as the celestial abode that we go to when we die. This is why we have to have a radical paradigm shift—a repentance, a *metanoia*—in our understanding of heaven, and the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus repeatedly said that the Kingdom of Heaven was *at hand*—not in some far off time after the death of His hearers. He also talked about the importance of *entering* the Kingdom of Heaven, and spoke of how hard it was for those with great wealth to enter that Kingdom. Let us understand clearly that the Kingdom of Heaven is a place in God that we are encouraged to enter into, and *to take by force* on this side of the grave! There are battles ahead, even and especially after we enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. There are enemies occupying that land. Paul speaks of principalities and dark powers in the *heavenly* places (Ephesians 3:10; 6:12; Colossians 1:16). As we enter into this realm of the Spirit, which is truly the Kingdom of Heaven (or Kingdom of God), the enemies that we encounter there are daunting, yes, much more daunting than anything that we encountered on the other side, before crossing that spiritual Jordan in our walk with the Lord. But praise God, He has promised to go before us. Just as with Israel of old, He has promised to go with us into battle and as we listen carefully to His directives, the enemy will ultimately and inevitably be defeated.

The book of Joshua records that there were 31 kings or kingdoms that were defeated after the Israelites crossed over into the Promised Land. Each of the battles fought were unique in the specific actions and strategies that were required to be victorious. Indeed, there were battles that were *not* won because of a failure to respond obediently to God’s directives. This is not just a reality that the Old Testament Israelites encountered. There are people who are just now waking up to God’s instruction specifically given to them, maybe even years ago. They ignored God’s command, or simply procrastinated. They now find themselves in a much worse condition and facing an even longer battle to fight as

a result. You may be one of those. There is an old adage that preachers love to proclaim, especially during stewardship season or when mounting some outreach campaign in their churches. That adage is that “delayed obedience is not obedience at all”. Friends, this is a lie from the author of lies to keep God’s people in a state of defeat. God is patient and will always receive repentance, ready to extend grace to those who have come to recognize their disobedience and are ready to do things His way. In this section, we shall examine a few of the battles of our spiritual forefathers in that ancient land of Israel so that we might glean some spiritual insight into the nature of the battles that lie before us in this hour.

The Battle of Jericho

The battle of Jericho is unique among all of the battles that the Israelites would face upon entering the Promised Land. It is unique, of course, in that this is the very first battle that they would face after crossing the Jordan. It is also unique, however, in that this is the only battle in which there really wasn’t much of a fight. The scriptural account tells us that on the seventh day, after marching around the city seven times, blowing the trumpets and shouting, the walls crumbled and the Israelites simply marched in, killed every living thing (except Rahab and her household), and took the designated spoils of war. There really isn’t much evidence of a battle here! There is much to be learned from this skirmish however as we consider the lessons that it has for possessing the Kingdom of God, our Promised Land.

The first thing that we must consider is that God asked them to do a very strange thing, something that would be an offense to any military strategist. The men of war were to simply march around the city with the priests blowing their horns—and then lay down for the night. They would do this for six days. Then on the seventh day, they would march around the city seven times, and after the seventh time, everyone would shout. What? What kind of military strategy is this? It would test the heart of obedience of this people, and especially its leaders. God had a plan, and there is no way that the military geniuses of that day could have predicted the coming down of those walls simply as a result of the people shouting. But they did!

God will always test the hearts of His people. He will ask things of us that simply do not make sense to the carnal mind. This has always been His way. Remember Noah and the building of the ark? The same God is at work today. I will never forget the morning when the Lord awoke me from my sleep at five o’clock in the morning saying, “It’s time to leave—NOW!” I knew that it was in relation to the

church I was attending, but surely he wasn't telling me to leave that church! I could only assume that He was telling me to step down from the session on which I served. "But," I reasoned, "if I step down now everyone will think that I am leaving just because I didn't get my way." You see, the session had just made a very controversial decision against which I had to stand alone because I knew that God was not in that decision. Nevertheless, I had fully accepted the decision that my fellow elders had made, and, after the decision was made, I was ready to work with them toward that end—wanted to, in fact. Now, I was asked to step down from the session, knowing that they would think I was simply being petulant? I delayed, but finally obeyed. Sure enough, this is *exactly* what they thought—that I was a spoiled child who was picking up his toys and going home because I didn't get my way. This was a charge that I had to endure. Oh, but the Lord wasn't done. He was not asking me to simply step down from the session—He was telling me that it was time to leave that church altogether. This was not clear until about a month later, and once again, I was misunderstood. Not only was I misunderstood, but I couldn't even understand why God was doing this! I loved this church. I could only proceed obediently, sometimes chafing in the process, but knowing that God had called me to this. Many months later, I would learn that God was not simply calling me out of that local congregation, but that He was calling me out of institutional Christianity altogether. This was a strange thing that the Lord was asking of me indeed! I have since, of course, come into much greater understanding of why this must be so. I have seen the walls of Jericho crumble, so to speak, but at the time, it made no sense whatsoever. This would not be the only time that God would test my heart by asking of me something that did not make sense to my carnal reasoning.

Let us look a little more closely now, at the specific instructions that God gave to Joshua. They were to march around the city once each day for six days. And on the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times, blow the trumpet, and give a victory shout. This is reminiscent of the creation story itself: God created the earth in six days, and on the seventh day He rested. There is great significance in the fact that the Israelites were told to march around Jericho seven days, and on the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times. Seven is a most significant number in scripture, and comes up repeatedly from the very beginning, in the creation story. We also see it in God's instruction regarding the sabbatical (seventh) year and the Jubilee year—the year following seven Sabbath years, or seven times seven years, when all lands which had been taken in payment for debts were to be returned to their original owners and when all indentured servants were to be freed. It figures in the feasts as the

seventh month was ushered in by the Feast of Trumpets; and a seven week interval between the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Pentecost. Jesus also understood the significance of the number seven when He was asked by Peter how many times he was obligated to forgive his brother—seven times? Jesus replied “*I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven*” (Matthew 18:22). He was to forgive until that forgiveness was complete in Peter; not merely forgiveness for specific offenses, but forgiveness of his brother so complete that nothing that this brother could do could any longer cause an offense in Peter. So frequently does the number seven occur in connection with God’s calendar that it would behoove us to understand its significance here.

The number seven in scripture signifies rest. The Sabbath, that seventh day, was the day that God rested from all of his works of creation; and it was the Sabbath that He ordered be set aside as a day of rest for His people. God was speaking to His people Israel here by His instruction to march for seven days and on the seventh day march around the city seven times. He was speaking to them of entering into His rest! He knew what they did not know—that the city walls would come crumbling down before them at the shout after the seventh time around on the seventh day. This was their Jubilee—their seven times seven, followed by the blowing of the trumpet. Remember, Jubilee was to be a time of rest for those who were indentured, and their property was to be returned to them on that year. And so it was that this Promised Land, this land of Canaan, was to be returned to its rightful owners more than 400 years after the promise originally came to Abraham.¹¹ They were to rest in the Lord’s mighty arm to go before them in this quest. And go before them He did in this first and significant battle.

Dear friend, the Lord is calling us *first* into His rest as we engage the enemy in our land of promise. We are told,

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into His rest hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (Hebrews 4:9-11).

There are battles before us, to be sure, but He goes before us. *He* will defeat the enemy as we cooperate with Him, even and especially when what He asks of us does not make sense. Trust Him, not trying to strategize

¹¹ It is interesting that there were approximately 490 years between God’s covenant with Abraham and Israel’s entry into the Promised Land. This “70 X 7” is but another manifestation of the Jubilee rest that God has destined for His chosen ones.

how *you* are going to overcome this enemy, nor even trying to figure out what God is up to. Just enter into His rest and trust Him, as you are obedient to the Spirit directive resonating within you.

The Battles of Ai

There were actually two battles fought to take the city of Ai. We can only understand these battles by examining what took place when the Israelites conquered the city of Jericho. They were commanded to (1) spare only Rahab and her household; (2) refrain from touching those things which God had designated as banned; and (3) take all of the silver and gold, and vessels of brass and iron into the treasury of the Lord (Joshua 6:18). One of their number, however, disobeyed this command and took for himself silver and gold along with other spoils of war that the Lord had banned. Achan's disobedience set the stage for a massive defeat the first time that the Israelites attempted to take Ai.

Joshua, however, unaware of Achan's wrongdoing, sent a reconnaissance party to spy out Ai. They came back with a report that this would be an easy take. They advised Joshua to send only 3000 men, for the men of Ai were few in number. Joshua responded accordingly. Despite the sparse population of fighting men in Ai, the Israelites were roundly defeated and those fighting men who remained came back to a thoroughly humiliated Israel. Joshua recognized the seriousness of this defeat. They had scarcely entered Canaan and in their second battle they suffered a humiliating defeat. Word would soon get around all of Canaan that Israel was weak and they would face even more defeats ahead. What is more, the name of the Lord God of Israel would be mocked. As Joshua went before the Lord about this, God revealed to him that there was sin in the camp and set in motion a procedure for how to expose this sin and deal with it. Achan's sin was exposed, and this required that he and his family be stoned and burned in the Valley of Achor, which means the valley of trouble or disturbance.

The Lord then commanded Joshua to go up and take Ai. The sin had been exposed and dealt with. God's anger was turned away, and He would go before them to deliver Ai into their hands. This time Joshua took 30,000 men, and with divine strategy, easily conquered Ai as they had done to Jericho.

I take three valuable lessons from these battles. The first is that *God is serious about dealing with sin!* God's requirement in response to Achan's sin was not merely a matter of restitution whereby Achan would be required to return the unlawful spoils that he had taken. Oh no! God required that not only Achan, but all of his family be stoned in the valley of destruction and then burned so that not

even their dead bodies would remain to contaminate the camp of Israel. Let us understand this through spiritual eyes as I say that God will not allow even the dead carcasses of old Adam in the land of promise to which He is leading us to take as our possession. Fire throughout scripture represents purification and refinement, especially as it consumes that which is evil. The most hidden sin of our hearts He will expose, and will consume it by his consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24). We may hold secret resentments or jealousies. These are incompatible with that place in Him that we are about to possess. He will be as ruthless with us as He has to be to put to death all that is within us that is not Him. Those who are destined to possess the Kingdom of God are being thoroughly purged so that there remains no Achan within us. Preston Eby speaks poignantly to this issue:

*“...when Israel entered into their land of inheritance they possessed the land, not by bringing things in, but by kicking things out. In like manner, the book of revelation portrays for us our inheritance, and the entrance of all God’s people into our promised land—the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The possession of our inheritance in Christ is not obtained by adding anything to Christ in us, but by what God **removes from us** so that Christ can be fully revealed in his saints” (Eby, *From the Candlestick to the Throne*, Book 9, p. 235, emphasis in the original).*

A second lesson for us in these battles is a lesson that God had been attempting to teach the Israelites from the beginning of their time in the wilderness. *They were to wait on Him, and go forth according to His word.* When they were encamped at Kadesh-barnea, the spies were sent out and came back with the report that there were giants in the land and that they would be overpowered. But God had said that He would go before them and only two—Joshua and Caleb—were able to see and walk by eyes of faith. This time, the circumstances were exactly the opposite: there were only a few measly fighting men in Ai and Israel could take them easily. In fact, the spies suggested that Joshua send a paltry 3000 men into battle to take Ai. The circumstances might have been different, but the Israelites were falling into the very same trap that they did at Kadesh-barnea—they were seeing their situation through only a carnal understanding and moved forth in the arm of the flesh and not by the direction and in the power of God. They lost that first battle because of this, even though their army was far mightier than that of Ai.

I am embarrassed to even remember the times that I have proceeded with my agenda without even thinking about taking my plans before the Lord and letting my spirit-man speak forth His wisdom. I did not consider the decision important enough to seek the Lord's direction on it! On the flip side, there have been too many times when the obstacles seemed so overwhelming that I ruled out moving in a direction before I even had time to consider it. It simply didn't make sense to my natural, carnal mind! This was Israel's mind at Kadesh-barnea. These two responses of the children of Israel *seem* to be diametrically opposed. In fact, however, they were responses coming from the same mind—a *carnal* mind. Neither was a response of faith. It is just as devoid of faith to take an action of which we are confident in our own flesh as it is to refuse to take an action because of fear of the giants that stand in the way. God is training a people today who learn to live and walk by His Spirit and not by their own carnal understanding and ability. I am certainly not suggesting that we must spend hours physically cloistered in a prayer closet before each and every decision that comes before us on a daily basis. I am, however, emphatically declaring that as we walk in close communion with our God, we increasingly come to recognize *His* will, and are ordered by *His* Spirit as we encounter the enemies which rise up within. As we are more and more ordered by the Spirit of God, our thoughts, decisions and actions less and less come forth from our carnal understanding and natural assessment of what lies before us.

I learn yet a third precious truth in Israel's experience at Ai. That is the unchanging, glorious truth that *our God is a redemptive God!* Israel fell short—both in the disobedience of Achan, and in the moving forth in a battle plan that was not ordered of the Lord. There was, however, redemption in the very heart of God toward His people, and this redemption was manifest as Israel repented of her wrongdoing. The scriptural account tells us that the Lord “turned from the fierceness of His anger” (Joshua 7:26). And He gave them the victory. It is so very discouraging when we stumble and miss God. Joshua was so discouraged that he cried out to the Lord, asking why He had ever brought them across the Jordan only to be humiliated in this way (Joshua 7:6-9). But there was victory ahead. The Lord was faithful to Joshua to reveal where Israel had failed and showed him the path back to victory. This is the redemptive nature of our God! The paradigm of law in which we have been immersed since the time of Moses (yes, the religious establishment today is still immersed in the paradigm of law, regardless of the spiritual rhetoric they would use to disguise that fact) tells us that our defeats are our just desserts for our sinful or ungodly decisions. Invariably, those caught in the clutches of the bondage of the law suffer condemnation and are

paralyzed from moving forward in God's great Kingdom agenda. There is, to be sure, a principle that we reap what we sow, and there *are* consequences for sin and for bad decisions that we make out of our carnal and unredeemed mind. The good news, however, is that even these consequences are intended for our ultimate redemption, as God uses them to bring the self into full submission unto Him. Let us learn from Joshua, as we receive of the Spirit of *our* Joshua, the Lord Jesus, to humble ourselves before the Lord, bow before Him in repentance, and rise up in faith, overcoming the enemy that would beset us!

The Gibeonite Deception

Israel was now developing a reputation as a mighty fighting force. When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard of the defeat of Ai at the hands of Joshua's army they were struck with great fear. Rather than attempt to fight the army of Israel, they sought to make peace with them; but they did it through deceptive means. They planned their deception carefully. They gathered up old sackcloths, worn out sandals, decrepit wine bottles, and came to Joshua's army as worn out long-distance travelers from a far-away land. They presented themselves as destitute sojourners who sought to come into league with the Israelites, as they had heard of their mighty valor in war. The fact is that these Gibeonites were Hivites, occupants of the land of Canaan whom Israel was instructed by God to completely drive out of the land. They were one of the many faces of the enemy that occupied the Promised Land.

Make no mistake about it: the Gibeonites were waging war against the Israelites! It was not a military war; rather it was a war of deception. If they could but find a way to make peace with the Israelites, they would be able to save their position in the land. These Gibeonites knew that Joshua's army would not respond favorably to a direct plea for a peace agreement because of the reputation that had preceded them. So, they sought to make peace through deception. Joshua and his army were wary of them, asking them all sorts of pointed questions until they were satisfied that they were indeed sojourners from a far-away country, and made a covenant with them to let them dwell among them. Israel's failure was the very same failure that led them to a routing defeat the first time that they attempted to take the city of Ai: *they failed to inquire of the Lord what they should do with the Gibeonites*. Three days later, the Gibeonite deception was revealed, and Israel, because it had made a covenant with the men of Gibeon, was bound to honor their agreement.

I would put forth to you that this was just as much a defeat at war as was the initial defeat at Ai. There was no bloodshed in this defeat. There were no

soldiers' lives lost. But Israel was now compromised. They had an enemy people living among them. God would withhold His judgment for a time and give them mighty victories over remaining enemies occupying the Promised Land as we shall see below. There would be a price to pay some 400 years later, however, as God brought a famine upon Israel because of Saul's earlier failure to honor the ill-conceived covenant. Saul slaughtered the Gibeonites out of his own fleshly zeal, and when David realized that the famine was the Lord's judgment he sought out the remaining Gibeonites to seek peace by asking what he could do to rectify this wrong that Saul had committed. He was told that their vengeance would be satisfied only by the giving over of seven of Saul's own offspring. David delivered Saul's sons—sparing only Mephibosheth—to the Gibeonites to be hanged. Yes indeed, there were consequences for this foolhardy peace treaty made with the Gibeonites that day!

Please hear what the Spirit of God would be speaking to us through this troublesome event in Israel's history. The enemy that would stubbornly occupy the land of our inheritance does not always attack us directly through persecution, sickness, emotional warfare, financial disaster, or any number of other means of direct assault. When these things come upon us we can fairly readily see them for what they are and come against them with all of the spiritual resources at our disposal. I am convinced that, just as was the case with the Gibeonites, the enemy of the Kingdom of God today would much prefer to "make peace" with us; and let there be no doubt, he will do this through deception. He will come to us most rationally and logically; or he will appeal to us emotionally, possibly by distracting us with a cause or a need that tugs at our heartstrings. In the frailty of our carnal minds we believe that the resolution of this thing is dependent on *our* response. Oh, the myriad of ways that we are lured into the agenda of the enemy camp! Several years ago I came to the realization that I could no longer give—neither financially, nor of my own time or labor—simply in response to a presented need, no matter how worthy that cause or need seemed to be. I must know from the Lord that *He* was directing me to give in this or that way. We must be so very careful to listen to the voice of the Spirit of God within us before launching His resources into any venture.

Let me be very clear here: Our Lord will redeem even our failures in this regard. He did so with the children of Israel as we shall see below, and He will with us. I have noted in an earlier chapter that there was a time when I believed that God wanted me to drive a truck. I thought I was going to be a missionary to truckers. This was my flesh. *I* wanted to drive a truck since I was 18 years old! Now, I had just retired, time was hanging heavy on my hands, and I had the opportunity to go

work for an over-the-road trucking company. My soulish desires deceived me into believing that God was asking me to do this as a way to somehow advance His Kingdom. Four months later, after three accidents in truck stops and in a shipping yard which left me with an intense fear of even going into these places, my trucking career was ended. I am grateful that God allowed me to realize my dream of driving a big rig, even if only for a few months, but I now realize that this was but a fleshly desire that I was acting upon. God had called me to Arkansas, not to be a missionary to truckers, but (initially at least) to do some deep work within me, hidden from the eyes of most. He brought me here to purge me of any need for recognition by others. Indeed, I was to be purged of any sense of my own accomplishment and to learn to trust and rest solely in Him and His resources alone. That process is still on-going. There is still an enemy of fleshly self that God is in the process of routing. He used even my own soulish decision to drive a truck to further this work! In the process, He has honed my discernment of my own motives as I endeavor to seek *His* wisdom in the battles that lie ahead.

I wish I could say that this was the only Gibeonite deception to which I have fallen prey, but it isn't. I can say, however, that God has used each and every one to bring me into a greater maturity and knowledge of Him. I know that each of you have had your own Gibeon-deceptions. Take heart that even these seeming failures are being used to further refine you. You are being prepared for even greater battles ahead as you march relentlessly forward to possess the land of inheritance that the Lord has prepared for you!

Victory Over the Amorites

The story of Joshua's victory over a coalition of five Amorite kings is the setting for one of the most spectacular natural events in history, namely the sun and the moon standing still for a full 24 hours while Joshua and his army avenged themselves upon the inhabitants of those five kingdoms. This is an event that has captured the imagination of generations, a story that is still taught to children in Sunday school classes today. As spectacular as this story is, it is but the exclamation point to a most remarkable routing of a powerful force that came against the children of Israel following the victory at Ai.

When the king of Jerusalem heard of the mighty victory of the Israelites over Ai, and of the crafty deception of the Gibeonites, he conspired with the remaining four Amorite kings to join forces against the Israelites. Their strategy was to first take out Gibeon. The Gibeonites appealed to Joshua to come to their aid, which Israel was now obligated to do because of the covenant that was made between

them—even though it was an ill-advised peace treaty. This time we can only presume that Joshua inquired of the Lord for the Lord assured him that He had delivered the Amorites into his hand. It is worthwhile to take note of the fact that the Lord spoke this forth as an accomplished fact. *He had already delivered the Amorites into the hands of the Israelites before they lifted a single sword.* When Israel came against the Amorite armies, they were met with total confusion and “slew them with a great slaughter” (Joshua 10:10). But God was not finished. As the surviving soldiers were fleeing from Israel’s army, the Lord God sent large hailstones which decimated them. The biblical account tells us that more men were killed with hailstones than those who were killed by the sword in that battle. This no doubt emboldened Joshua, for he then had the audacity to command the sun and the moon to stand still to give the Israelites time to completely avenge their enemies. I am imagining that it was getting near sunset, as the biblical account suggests that both the sun and the moon were providing much needed light—the sun on Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. In my imagination, Joshua was saying to the Lord, “You have brought us this far, and it is now at the end of the day and we have not completed this task of totally routing our enemy. Therefore—*sun and moon stand still!*” Joshua *knew* that God had ordered the complete victory over these Amorite kingdoms. And because he knew the will of God, he could, in complete confidence, order the sun and moon to stand still as though it were God Himself ordering it. God responded to Joshua’s command by holding back the setting of the sun for 24 hours. Scripture says that there has never been, before or since, another day like this day.

This was, in all likelihood, the most spectacular victory for Israel since they left Egypt more than 40 years earlier. It is all the more amazing because it followed on the heels of a potentially devastating “defeat” at the hands of the Gibeonites because of their failure to seek the Lord before entering into a covenant with this enemy. Nevertheless, the Lord did not abandon them, and indeed went before them with greater power than they had ever seen since crossing the Red Sea.

Oh, what an important lesson there is in this battle for us as we take possession of our land of promise! In my experience, one of the greatest obstacles to overcoming the giants in my life is a prior defeat. I am naturally prone to beat myself up when I make a misstep or fail to overcome in any given area of my life. There was a time when I needed to repeat (many times a day) Romans 8:1 wherein we are told, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”* Indeed, to engage in self-condemnation is to walk after the flesh! We see our failures and become overwhelmed by them because we mistakenly assume that our victories

are because of *our* goodness or faithfulness, and therefore our failures reflect a lack on our part. As we learn to walk in the Spirit, we come to recognize deep within that we are but a vessel and that there is no good thing within us save the Spirit of God who is as a tiny mustard seed ever growing within us. Even our failures are opportunities for this seed to put down deeper roots as we learn to walk in His righteousness and not our own. This is the knowledge that we must have as we encounter further battles. *These are the Lord's battles and we must move forward in the consciousness of that reality.*

Joshua provides a powerful role model for how we engage these battles. He did not dwell on the mistaken covenant with the Gibeonites. Word came (from the Gibeonites themselves) that the Amorite kings were coming against them, and Joshua immediately went into action. I believe that he checked his spirit, inquiring of the Lord before he went, but he did not hesitate nor was he burdened down with condemnation or fear because of the Gibeonite deception. *He moved forward and the Lord assured him that He had delivered the Amorites into his (Joshua's) hand.* There was no room for doubt here. So confident was Joshua that after the initial defeat, and after the hailstorm, he had the brazenness to speak to the sun and moon and order them to stand still. Please take note here that Joshua did not come before the Lord in supplication, saying something like, "Oh God, if it be thy will, please keep the sun from setting so that we can complete our task..." Such is precisely the spiritually anemic posture with which people in most churches today are taught to approach God. They are taught that they cannot possibly know the mind or will of God, so they approach their Heavenly Father as beggars, pleading that He be so favorably inclined toward them as to give them a morsel. This was not Joshua's approach to God. *Joshua commanded the sun and moon.* This was the evidence of the authority that he knew that he had because this time he *knew* the will of God, and he operated in accordance with that will.

This is the authority that we have as we are, in Christ, taking possession of that place that He has gone ahead to prepare for us. Friends, we must know who we are in Christ Jesus. And knowing who we are, we must learn to function as His representatives. As we operate in and according to the Spirit, we are indeed His representatives and we are given authority to speak into existence those things which are not seen as though they are. The time is long past for the sons of God to settle for slippery responses to life challenges. Responses such as "if it be thy will" or "please heal sister so and so in Jesus name" have no place in the spoken arsenal of the sons of God. **WE MUST KNOW THE WILL OF GOD**, and if we are unsure of the will of God in a particular situation, we do not speak forth in prayer

or any other word until we are confident of what God would do in any given situation. We then speak forth that word with full confidence that God will accomplish it! This is how Joshua defeated the Amorite kingdoms, and it is also the way that we will defeat the forces that conspire against us as we move into our destiny in Christ.

Unconquered Territory

Following their victory over the five Amorite kingdoms, Joshua and his army proceeded to decimate city-kingdoms throughout the land of Canaan. The Biblical record indicates that a total of 31 kingdoms were conquered under Joshua's command. Their victories were mighty, and no doubt they had earned the reputation of a mighty warrior people. There were, however, territories that yet remained unconquered at the time of Joshua's death. Among these territories were those occupied by some of the most powerful inhabitants of Israel's Promised Land. These were lands occupied by the Philistines. Among these people were the giants that put so much fear into the spies who came back with a negative report some 20 years earlier. And so they remained as "unfinished business" in the land of Canaan.

These Philistines and the other unconquered kingdoms would remain a threat and a bane to Israel's well-being throughout its history as recorded in the Old Testament. They had an army that struck fear in the heart of Saul's army, particularly one called Goliath. It took a humble shepherd boy—himself a type of Christ—to come forth in the power of Almighty God to slay this giant. This was also a deceptive people, as we see in the seduction that brought down Israel's strong man Samson. The Philistines and other unconquered nations would also cause God's people to engage in all manner of idolatrous acts as they freely intermarried with these people and took on their ways and customs, directly in violation of God's command to keep themselves separate. Israel would eventually be conquered and taken into Babylonian captivity for 70 years because of this unfaithfulness.

Did Joshua fail to complete his mission by not taking out all of these other city-states prior to his death? Throughout most of my years of reading and meditating on this biblical record of Israel's history I believed this to be so. If only Joshua and his army had taken out *all* of the inhabitants of the land as the Lord had instructed, they would not have faced all of the temptation and ultimately disobedience that took place years, decades and even centuries later. I read these passages now, however, with an eye to spiritually discern more completely what is taking place here in the grand economy of God.

As we understand the Old Testament narrative as a shadow and type of greater spiritual realities yet to unfold, even in our day, we see a rather exciting and challenging drama taking place. We must understand, as I believe most of you reading this article do, that Joshua is a type, a foreshadowing of Christ. Indeed, “Joshua” is the English rendering of “Yeshua”, the same name that is given to our Lord, and rendered to us from the Greek as “Jesus.” Joshua’s task was to take the children of Israel into the Promised Land, and to possess it. Joshua accomplished this task. It was to future leaders and battles that all of the inhabitants of the land were to be subdued.

This task of crossing the Jordan and possessing the Promised Land was also accomplished by Jesus, our Joshua, some 1400 years later at Calvary. By His death, Jesus took us from the realm of Egyptian slavery into the land of promise. This would come about—both individually and corporately—through a time of wandering as we have been in a process of being readied to cross the mighty Jordan. Make no mistake—Joshua’s (Jesus’) mission as the Galilean who walked the face of this earth some 2000 years ago has been accomplished! He has taken us into the Promised Land, subdued the enemy and, as our forerunner, taken possession of it on our behalf. He has gone before us, just as the God of the Israelites went before them, and the victory is His. Jesus told His disciples, just before his death that He was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:2). This has been done. The promised inheritance has been secured. Indeed, those of the first fruits company—those who have surrendered to the absolute Lordship of Christ, who have counted the cost, and who have willingly taken His sufferings upon themselves—are even now battling the Jericho’s and Ai’s, taking possession one stronghold at a time, and occupying that place that He has gone to prepare for them.

There are, however, still giants in that land. There are territories yet unconquered. Does this mean that Christ, our Joshua, has failed at His mission? By no means. Those territories were left unconquered in order to teach the children of Israel to overcome the enemy in their land of possession. Joshua was no longer with them in body. Nevertheless, the same Spirit that was within Joshua and which went before the army of Israel was still with them. They must now mature into their inheritance. Friends, this Spirit of Inheritance is now upon us. We are being called this day to possess the land, to recognize and apprehend the glorious inheritance that is ours; and furthermore, as partners and joint-heirs with Christ, to rout the enemy that remains in the land. This is now our challenge of *living* in the Promised Land!

Living in the Promised Land

Despite the fact that there remained enemy kingdoms to be conquered, the children of Israel took up residence in the Promised Land (with the exception of the tribes of Gad, Reuben and the half-tribe of Manessah). They would now face the challenges of living in a land flowing with milk and honey, with total dependence on the former and latter rains from the Lord to nourish their crops. This was a different way of living than they had experienced either in Egypt or in the Wilderness. They would also have to learn to live with enemy forces as neighbors. They were called apart as a separate nation, and this would now be tested. God had given special instructions regarding the division of the land, provision for the Levites, and the setting up of cities of refuge. They were taught concerning the keeping of the three festivals—Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. They were warned of that which was forbidden, including unclean food and the worshipping of idols. All of this and much more comprised the blueprint that the Lord God spoke through His servant Moses while they were still in the wilderness. This would, indeed, be a new way of living for the people of God.

There is much that we have to learn from these ancient ancestors of our faith. This is for us, like them, uncharted territory that will require leaving behind old paradigms. It will require, not only that we leave Egypt, but that the ways of Egypt be purged from within us. I speak here to those who have come out of the Babylonish (Egyptian) religious system. We may have come out, but our years of indoctrination have left us with all manner of ideas and methods that are not ordained of God for the place of inheritance that we now occupy. Similarly, the coping mechanisms that we learned while in the place of the wilderness must be carefully examined and placed upon the altar as we allow the Holy Spirit to lay out His blueprint for our Kingdom lifestyle. This is, indeed, uncharted territory, and we shall be examining the lessons that the Lord has for us in the experience of the children of Israel in Chapter 5. In the meantime, I would urge each of you reading this series to be inquiring of the Lord and listening carefully for what that Promised Land lifestyle might look like for you!

CHAPTER 5: LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE PROMISED LAND

The Israelites had been on a long journey since leaving Egypt more than 40 years earlier. They witnessed the miraculous hand of God crossing the Red Sea, leaving Pharaoh's army to drown behind them. They were the beneficiary of God's miraculous provision during a 40-year trek in the wilderness. They were brought to the very brink of Canaan, their land of promise, when Moses died, not ever having set foot in that land. A new leader, Joshua, would take them across the Jordan and into the Promised Land. Once across, they faced the occupants of Canaan who represented a formidable threat. Joshua and his people knew that this was their land. God had promised it to them, but it would require some severe battles before Israel would be able to take possession of this land. Scripture records that there were a total of 31 kingdoms that were defeated under Joshua's leadership.

Once in the Promised Land, and having now taken possession of a large portion of that land, the Israelites were now faced with an entirely different set of circumstances than what they were accustomed to in both Egypt and in the wilderness. They would face new opportunities and challenges that required a different way of living than what they had known. It was, for them, uncharted territory. This chapter explores these opportunities and challenges through a spiritual lens; for this is the land that we have entered. The Lord would have us understand this spiritual land to which He has been taking us as we, too, must learn to navigate this uncharted terrain. So with this in mind, let us consider what this paradigm shift meant for our spiritual ancestors and glean from the lessons they learned for our own living in the Promised Land.

Unconquered Territory

The victories that the Israelites secured after crossing the Jordan as they took possession were impressive, and by all accounts they had earned the reputation of a mighty warrior people. There were, however, territories that yet remained unconquered at the time of Joshua's death. Within these territories were the Philistines, some of the most powerful inhabitants occupying Israel's Promised Land. These people were the giants that put so much fear into the spies who came back with a negative report some 20 years earlier. And so it was that the Philistines, as well as several other peoples, remained as "unfinished business" for the Israelites who took up residence in the land of Canaan.

God promised His people that He would go before them and drive out the remaining occupants of their Promised Land:

And the Lord your God, He shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the Lord your God hath promised unto you (Joshua 23:5).

God's promise to go before them was not unconditional, however. There were several conditions laid down in this chapter of promise, the 23rd chapter of Joshua:

- They were to remain courageous (v. 6)
- They were to remain obedient to the laws written in the book of the law of Moses (v. 6)
- They were not to turn aside, neither to the right or to the left (v. 6)
- They were not to serve or acknowledge the gods of the remaining nations, but cleave unto the Lord (v. 7)
- They were not to intermarry with these nations (vs. 12-13)

As I confessed in Chapter 4, I have pondered the question of whether Joshua failed to complete his mission by not taking out all of these other city-states prior to his death. While I had always assumed this to be the case, we see no evidence whatsoever in the scriptural account that God is angry at or disappointed in Joshua regarding this matter. If, however, we understand the Old Testament narrative as a shadow and type of greater spiritual realities yet to unfold, even in our day—indeed, even in our personal conquest of taking the Kingdom of God within us—we see that this ancient drama is a picture of the violence that the Kingdom of Heaven must suffer, and of the passionate men and women that will take it by force (Matt. 11:12).

Joshua is a type, a foreshadowing of Christ. Indeed, “Joshua” is the English translation of “Yeshua”, the same Hebrew name that is given to our Lord, and translated to us from the Greek as “Jesus.” Joshua’s task was to take the children of Israel into the Promised Land, and to possess it. *Mission accomplished.* This task of crossing the Jordan and possessing the Promised Land was also accomplished by Jesus, our Joshua, some 1400 years later at Calvary where He not only died a most ignominious death, but praise God, He arose again victorious over the last enemy, even death! By His death and resurrection, Jesus took us from the realm of Egyptian slavery into the land of promise. This would come about in our experience—both individually and corporately—*through a time of wandering* as we have been in a process of being made ready to cross the mighty

Jordan. Make no mistake—Jesus’ mission as the Galilean who walked the face of this earth some 2000 years ago has been accomplished! He has defeated the enemy and, as our forerunner, taken possession of the Kingdom of Heaven on our behalf; He has gone before us, and the victory is OURS! Jesus told His disciples, just before his death that He was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:2). This place of promise has been secured. Indeed, those of the first fruits company—those who have surrendered to the absolute Lordship of Christ, who have counted the cost, and who have willingly taken His sufferings upon themselves—are even now battling the inhabitants of the land, taking possession one stronghold at a time, and occupying that place that He has gone to prepare for them. Take heart—the battle has already been won!

Make no mistake, there remain GIANTS in that land. Though there are territories yet unconquered, this does *not* mean that Christ, our Joshua, has failed at His mission! Those unconquered territories would require a lifestyle of unwavering holiness and fear of the Lord God of Israel if these new inhabitants were to live faithful and successful lives in the Promised Land of Canaan. Joshua was no longer with them in body. Nevertheless, the same Spirit that was with Joshua and which went before the army of Israel was still with them, just as we have the Holy Spirit of Christ now with us and in us.

We know, of course, from the account in the first chapter of Judges that the Israelites were *not* faithful to drive out the rest of the inhabitants, and that they failed to meet the conditions that the Lord their God had set forth. The consequences were made clear: “...*they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you*” (Judges 2:3). This failure to completely rout the enemy in their territory did, indeed, prove to be a snare unto them. The Old Testament narrative is remarkably candid in its account of Israel’s failure to drive out the nations, as well as in its telling of the many acts of disobedience wherein Israel failed to meet the conditions that the Lord set forth. This candor is for our benefit, as we can learn from Israel’s experience, in shadow and type, how critically important it is for us to understand and faithfully meet the conditions that God has established for us to *fully and completely* possess and inherit the Kingdom of Heaven—our Promised Land! Our part is simply to be faithful to that which the Spirit of the Lord is speaking forth within our being. God spoke a beautiful Word to a very special member of His bride—my wife (*His wife!*)—one day several years ago when she was burdened down with the cares of life that tried to distract from God’s assignment for her. He said: “***You take care of My business, and I will take care of your business!***” Let us consider “His business” as

we look briefly, through spiritual eyes, at the requirements that the Lord laid down in Joshua 23.

Remain Courageous

“Be ye therefore very courageous...” (Joshua 23:6)

The Philistines and the other unconquered kingdoms would remain a threat and a bane to Israel’s well-being throughout its history as recorded in the Old Testament. They had an army that struck fear in the heart of Saul’s army, particularly one Goliath. Saul’s army was ready to give up. They were terrified with fear at the sight of this strong man. It took a humble shepherd boy—himself a type of Christ—to come forth in the power of Almighty God to slay this giant. David refused to wear Saul’s armor. His courage was not based on any ability that he had or on any armor that he wore. David understood the “therefore” in Joshua 23:6. His courage was based on the fact that God had promised to drive the enemy out from before them; *therefore* he was courageous. David *knew* the will of God in this matter and went forth in the confidence of the strength of God’s might to fulfill His purpose.

Do you find yourself overwhelmed by the power of the Philistines in your life? That Philistine, however he manifests himself, is enormous. I will not downplay his power, and neither should you. Your Goliath may be an addiction that you have never been able to overcome. He may come in the form of a relative, employer or business partner that brings to the surface the worst expression of your Adamic nature. It may be that you are facing overwhelming fears related to a health issue or financial circumstance. *In all of this, we are told to be courageous.* Our courage is not based upon changing circumstances that appear to offer a glimmer of hope—though praise God when He *does* begin to shift our circumstances; nor is our courage grounded in any way in our ability to change or improve our circumstances. *Our courage is based solely on the promise of God to go before us and expel the enemy.*

We can even stare death in the face and have courage, because we are promised that not even death can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). If you have ever had the incredible privilege of being in the presence of a dying person who has walked closely with the Lord, you will give testimony to the courage that is ours in the Lord. I will never forget sitting at the bedside of my father-in-law in his last hours. This was a man who tended to all of the cares of life just as we all do, right up until his last days. But there was a transformation that I witnessed during the last few days of his life. I saw a radiance in his face

that I had never seen before. When his eyes were opened, it was as though he were looking unto another city, which he had now come to recognize was his true home. Indeed, I know with a certainty that he *was* looking unto that city. I saw no fear whatsoever, even though he was staring death in the face. This is the courage of which I am speaking. It is a courage that is given us in sufficient measure to meet every circumstance that we face. It is a courage that comes with the presence of the Lord in US!

Remain Obedient to the Law

“Be ye therefore very courageous, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses...” (Joshua 23:6).

Throughout the history of the Old Testament, obedience to the law was stressed. Promises were given to those who honored and obeyed the Lord’s commandments, while at the same time dire consequences would be the result if they failed to remain obedient.

For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; Then will the LORD drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves. Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be. There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you. Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known (Deuteronomy 11:22-28).

Israel was a special called out people. God had called them apart from the rest of the nations to be a peculiar people. The Hebrew word for “peculiar” is *cěgullah*, and carries the meaning of being a unique treasure or a valued property. Among all of the other peoples of the earth, Israel was unique in its relation to the heart of God. This did not mean that God did (and does) not love *all* of the peoples on the face of the earth; He created them all. But Israel was a chosen people that

God had called apart for a special purpose to represent Him in the earth. This was a highly privileged position, but it also required a lifestyle of obedience to His commandments.

There is a *cęgullah* people today; they are a valued property and a unique treasure of the Lord. He has called them out to represent Him to all of the peoples and nations of the earth. God’s heart of love toward all of His creation is infinite, and He has determined that *all* will be reconciled unto Him (Colossians 1:20). How will this take place? His plan has not changed. He has called out a special people—a *cęgullah*—to represent Him on the earth today. Friends, we are that special people, His remnant called out from among all the peoples of the earth, to represent Christ, the very character of God, to the world today.

This privilege that is ours carries with it great responsibility to be obedient in all of our ways to His commandments. Please understand, this is not an obligation to the Old Covenant whereby we are under the yoke of *that* law. The Old Testament Israelites amply demonstrated that they were not able to keep it, and neither are we. Jesus said, *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another* (John 13:34). This “law of love” requires complete and total surrender and yieldedness to the Holy Spirit within each of us who have been born anew of His Spirit. While there are those today who insist that we continue to be bound by the Mosaic law, such insistence is a blasphemy to the cross of Christ, and represents a falling away from grace, which is the power of the cross within each of us (Galatians 5:4). I will be even so bold to insist that our allegiance to the law of the Spirit will almost certainly require of us actions that, on the face of them, would seem to violate the letter of the law. I have written of this in [Law of the Spirit—Higher than the Moral Law](#), and I refer you to that article for a more thorough discussion of this important understanding.¹² I want only to emphasize here that God is calling out a people today—a remnant who hear His voice and will yield to the slightest leading of His eye within them and who are committed to being obedient to their *Good Shepherd* regardless of the cost.

Turn Not Aside, to the Right or to the Left

“Be ye therefore very courageous, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left...” (Joshua 23:6).

¹² For those of you not reading the on-line version of this book, this article can be found at www.wordforthebride.net/Books-Articles.html.

This condition speaks of vigilance and a singleness of vision. The Israelites had kingdoms yet to conquer in their newly-inhabited Promised Land. Anything that would distract them from this vision of driving out the remaining peoples in the land would only deter them from that place of complete victory and promised rest.

We must come to see that the distractions in our lives pose a major threat to our pressing forward in the things of God. These distractions come in many forms: We watch too much television. We get our feelings hurt, and dwell on petting the ego. We have circumstances that come up that seem so pressing. We let other people's needs—particularly those close to us—dictate our own priorities far too often.

Indeed, the Lord has been dealing with me on all of these matters, and in some cases severely. Just this morning, before I sat down to write, I was preoccupied with distractions that were troubling my soul, and when I went before the Lord about this, He reminded me of the fact that the next topic I was to be addressing for this writing was “turning not to the right or to the left.” His command to me, just minutes ago, was to get my mind off of these other things and to get writing! I didn't feel like writing. I wasn't in any mood to sit down and contemplate Kingdom matters. I understand that God is trying to instill into me a firm knowing that my inspiration does not come from the realm of soul, or lofty emotional peaks. My inspiration comes from Him, and if I am obedient to turn not to the right or the left, He will be faithful to inspire and I can write with the “pen of a ready writer”...or in our day, “the keyboard of a ready writer.”

James tells us that *“a double minded man is unstable in all his ways”* (James 1:8). In the verses leading up to this proclamation, James exhorts his readers to count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations, that the trying of their faith works within them patience, and that patience leads unto their perfection. A true and appropriate translation of these verses might read “Count it all joy when you are encompassed with various trials, for these trials will produce in you a steadfastness and perseverance that will bring you to maturity and completion.” All of these matters that come up in our lives, which are so annoying and possibly troubling, are used by God to bring us to full stature and maturity. .

Do not be distressed by the cares of life that would vie for your attention. Understand and believe that God is going before you in all of these matters, and that He allows these circumstances in our lives to test us and to teach us to press on with a singleness of vision. Let me use a rather imperfect illustration with which most of us should be able to identify. When you first learned to drive, you

saw a world around you that, while you may have seen it before, now posed potential consequences, even a threat, to you successfully arriving at your destination. There were other cars approaching intersections. There were pedestrians waiting to cross a street. There were traffic lights ahead. In addition to all of this, you also could not help but be aware of a multitude of distractions: a yard sale taking place on your right; a husband and a wife arguing on their front lawn on your left; a pretty sunset in the west; and a rainbow in the east. There was a time, when you only knew what it was to be a passenger in the car, that you would be absorbed by all of the distractions. They were your *main* focus then, and you would even seek to get the driver's attention, not understanding that these were distractions: "Look mommy, see the pretty rainbow behind us!" Mommy would oblige by saying, "Isn't it beautiful," but in reality (if she was a good driver) her focus would not be on the rainbow in the rear view mirror. As a good driver, she had learned to tune out all of the distractions so as to single mindedly focus on those matters pertinent to her arriving successfully at her destination—the traffic lights, the pedestrians, the road conditions and the other traffic. As you became of age, and it was now your turn behind the wheel, you also learned, over the course of time, to tune out all of these other distractions. This requires singleness of vision. If these distractions were not there, however, you would never develop the discipline of learning to ignore those things in your driving environment which are not relevant to your goal of successfully arriving at your destination.¹³

Friends, as we are moving into the deeper things of God, recognizing our call to sonship, we are, indeed, moving from simply being a passenger in God's great plan to sitting in the driver's seat. God is now working in us a disciplined focus to see past all of the distractions that would come our way, and to focus clearly on the Kingdom road before us. He is teaching us to, first, recognize distractions *as distractions*. We must learn to discern between that which is to be tended to for Kingdom purposes and for our own spiritual edification, and that which is but a *soulish* edification. Having learned to discern, the Lord would then have us learn how to take our focus off of these distractions, to extract ourselves from situations that hold us in bondage to the needs and demands of the soul realm, and to set our wheels on the highway to complete victory over all remaining enemies in our land.

¹³ I am not suggesting, of course, that a good driver cannot take note of the environment around them when they drive. What a great gift it is to take a drive in the country side and enjoy the beauty of God's creation! The point that I am making here is that we learn to prioritize our focus.

Do Not Acknowledge the Gods of the Other Nations

“That ye come not among these nations...neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them” (Joshua 23:7).

A god is that which we worship, that to which we give our allegiance. There were a number of gods to which peoples in the nations not yet driven out of Israel’s Promised Land gave their allegiance. Chief among these was Baal, who was considered the supreme god among the Canaanites. Baal was a fertility god and it was believed that his actions were responsible for the earth bearing crops and for women bearing children. He was the god above all other gods, which is why Elijah’s successful challenge to him at Mount Carmel was so significant. Ashtoreth was a companion, fertility goddess to Baal in the Canaanite pantheon of gods. Solomon was lured into Ashtoreth worship by some of his foreign wives. Still another god of the surrounding nations was Dagon, a god of the Philistines. It is said that the statue of Dagon, who was the god of water and of grain, had the body of a fish and the head of a human. You might remember that when the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant, they placed it in the temple of Dagon. It was also in the temple of Dagon that Samson met his doom. Two other gods of significance in Israel’s milieu were Chemosh, a god of war, and Molech. These were worshipped by the Moabites and Ammonites respectively, and both required some of the most brutal acts of human sacrifice imaginable. Solomon also gave allegiance to these gods by erecting high places for them. These are but some of the most significant gods among many others that Israel found in the new environment that was its inheritance.

I would contend that while these gods are not officially worshipped in the religious centers surrounding those who are reading these pages, the spirit of these gods is still very much alive in our religions and world today. We must be aware of them and of the subtle but powerful influence that they wield. I am not speaking here of the objects of worship of foreigners entering our borders. Nor am I referring to some of the efforts by feminists and others to feminize God through the worship of Diana, Sophia, etc. I cannot support such efforts, but these are not the gods that pose the most significant challenges to our world today. The challenges we face are the gods of Baal, Ashtoreth, Dagon, Chemosh and Molech in all of their various forms today that would vie for our worship and allegiance. I will be so bold as to suggest that the power that these gods had over the ancient Israelites and the power that they have over us today is directly proportional to our *love of self*. For example, Baal was the supreme god of the

Canaanites, responsible for their overall well-being. Baal and Ashtoreth were fertility gods, and pleasing these gods meant favor at harvest and child-bearing time. The gods of Baal and Ashtoreth are very much alive in our world today, though they come with different names.

(I have some things to say now that may be regarded by many of you as outside the bounds of what is appropriate for a “spiritual” writing such as this. What I have to say will sound political to some. These are things, however, that I strongly believe have impacted the spiritual condition of vast numbers of conscientious followers of Christ in a most insidious way. I am, for this reason, compelled to speak on these matters.)

One of the names that we have substituted for Baal today is *nationalism*. I do not oppose loyalty to one’s country by any means, but when that loyalty supersedes loyalty to God almighty, it has become idolatry of a false god. There is a phrase “God and country,” commonly used, especially among political conservatives, in the United States today. My observation, however, tells me that virtually no one using this phrase is extolling an unwavering commitment to the God of the universe Who is indwelling their being. They are, instead, extolling a patriotism of country above all else, and to most who use this phrase, God and country means that loyalty to country *is* loyalty to God, and that *disloyalty* to country in any expression is, by definition, treachery against God Himself. If one is unpatriotic, he or she is regarded by these flag-bearing zealots to be unfit for the Kingdom of God. This is Baal worship, dear friends, and it is a far greater threat to our moving forward in the Kingdom of God than is Islam, feminism or any other “ism” on the landscape today. Remember, Baal was the supreme god of the Canaanites, worshipped above all other gods. We find Baal taking the form of the Caesars in the Roman Empire; and of the kings in the various monarchies down through history. While we, in America and other democracies throughout the world, have rejected such loyalty to a monarch, the vast majority of our citizens nevertheless maintain an allegiance to the nation-state of our birth or residence above all other loyalties—even above our allegiance to Christ if that allegiance requires any action that might be regarded as disloyal to country. That is why I say that this spirit of nationalism *is* a spirit of Baal.¹⁴

¹⁴ It is, of course, possible to be patriotic and not be guilty of Baal worship. This patriotism, however, should never trump a loyalty to Christ. I am speaking here, rather, of a spirit which I have observed in our day which has raised loyalty to country to such a place that it competes with one’s loyalty to Christ, and with their obedience to their calling in Christ. I recall, for example, during the Viet Nam War, some of my friends registered as conscientious objectors. They were not part of any religious group, such as the Mennonites or Amish, who formally opposed war. They were simply convicted within themselves that it was wrong to go to war, particularly

The spirit of Baal masquerades in other forms as well. I will remind you that Baal and Ashtoreth were worshipped as fertility gods and were responsible for successful harvests. Agriculture was the primary economic endeavor in that day and so it was important to give homage to these fertility gods so that they would be blessed financially. Corresponding to our worship of country, Americans (as well as citizens of many other countries) bow to the god of capitalism. Political conservatives in particular tend to esteem a capitalist economic system in a manner that is idolatrous. I know that I will probably alienate some readers when I declare with every fiber of my being that there is nothing godly inherent in capitalism. In fact, I believe the case can be made that capitalism, left unchecked, can be one of the most brutal, immoral economic systems known to man. I had a very close friend (now deceased) who was an economist, trained in the von Mises economic tradition (von Mises is an extremely conservative capitalist think tank headquartered at Auburn University in Alabama). He would argue eloquently the godly virtues of capitalism. Sometime after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the breakup of that union into independent nation states, my friend had the opportunity to travel to Russia to teach economics for a brief season. He went with his prepared notes to teach the virtues of capitalism. When he arrived there, he discovered that capitalism had reached Russia long before he arrived. He discovered capitalism in its most pure, unchecked form, and he was horrified. People were being exploited mercilessly by the avarice of greedy entrepreneurs who had no compassion whatsoever on their countrymen who were suffering because of their corruption. There seemed to be no moral compass whatsoever guiding the economy of Russia at that time. When my friend came back to the United States he informed me that he had to completely rewrite his lectures to emphasize the importance of a godly moral foundation for their economic endeavors. Capitalism must be kept in check, he said, by an allegiance to One higher than an economic system.

The god of Baal not only manifests itself in nationalism or in allegiance to an economic system such as capitalism, but it also seduces us through undue dependence on government. Most developed nations throughout the world today have grown the size of their governments because the people have come to rely on their governments to insure their well-being. This dependence on government is, indeed, the very basis of socialistic, communistic, and other big-

this war. They were regarded as traitors, and their personal convictions were mocked. I am perfectly aware that there were many who used this label simply because they were cowards. I would humbly suggest, however, that the very predisposition on the part of vast numbers of citizens to demean another's stand of conscience when it challenges the demands and expectations of a civil government is evidence of making our nation-state the object of Baal worship.

government regimes. I would emphatically point out that dogmatic loyalty to these forms of economic and political orders is also giving allegiance to the spirit of Baal; it is looking to a god of the harvest to fulfill the needs and desires of self.

We are afraid to speak out against our government, just as the Canaanites of old feared offending Baal, because we have put our government with all of its various agencies in a wrongful place in our lives, and because of this, in a wrongful place in our *hearts*. When we become this dependent, we become severely limited in our capacity to walk by faith in God and God alone because of the financial, political, social or even physical consequences that might ensue if the dictates of our faith were to upset the Baal government that we have come to depend upon for our well-being—the well-being of *self*.

The well-being of self is also at the root of our worship of Ashtoreth, Dagon, Chemoth and Molech. These, too, were gods who, when worshipped, were believed to bring wealth, prosperity and well-being. But these demands were costly; some of the most brutal forms of child sacrifice were performed as rites of worship to these gods, particularly Chemoth and Molech.

I have never been inclined to write on the evils of abortion, and I am not intending to begin here. (Anti-abortionists have themselves been far too brutal in their treatment of young mothers-to-be who find themselves in horrific situations and who must make difficult decisions which, for many, are regretted years later.) I do write here, however, regarding a *spirit* which I see on the ascendancy throughout much of the world—especially the developed world—which would encourage abortion, child neglect, and other horrifying forms of child (and elder) sacrifice. These sacrifices are far more pervasive than abortion statistics would suggest; they also include such tragedies as giving birth to deformed or addicted infants by alcohol- and drug-addicted mothers, and the abandonment of highly dependent and vulnerable children and elderly to inferior care or no care at all. These tragedies are often (though not always) the result of a culture of hedonism which places the felt needs and even pleasures of self above the needs and well-being of the most vulnerable and defenseless among us. Whether the lifestyle resulting in the neglect of the defenseless be one of drug addiction or of pursuing a high paying career at the expense of meeting the needs of those who are dependent upon our care, when the hedonistic spirit of Chemoth or Molech is driving it, those caught in the clutches of these lifestyles are willing to make all manner of sacrifices, which, but for divine intervention, violently deny the very image of God in those sacrificed.

There is much more that could be explored regarding the gods that are encountered in our land of promise today. This is not a political issue. It is not a matter of conservatives *or* liberals having the moral high ground. Neither is it a matter of attempting to change the political, cultural, economic, or normative climate of a society. Oh dear reader, ***this is a matter of absolute and unbending allegiance to the Most High God who has taken up residence within each of us.*** It is a matter of allowing Him to reconcile and subdue all that is of the old Adam within us, to set our face as flint to that which He has called us, turning neither to the right nor to the left. As this spiritual shift takes place within us, we will, to be sure, inevitably find our political, social, cultural and economic leanings shifting regarding this issue and that. More importantly, however, we will find these leanings to be waning in their importance, as we take our cues less from these worldly external reference points and more and more from the inner God-compass within us. “And the things on earth will grow strangely dim, in the Light of His glory and grace!” is the chorus of a familiar hymn. As this takes place, we truly can proclaim that we do *not* acknowledge or bow down to the gods of the nations.

Do not Inter-marry with the Peoples of the Nations

“Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you” (Joshua 23:12-13).

This condition has to do with our relationships with those around us. Our faithfulness to God is powerfully influenced by the relationships and associations that we have. Ask any parent of a teenager who has travelled the road of juvenile delinquency if they think that the associations we keep are significant predictors of the actions we will eventually take, and you will get a lecture that will leave no doubt in your mind on this matter! These ungodly relationships can have such a devastating effect if not repented of, that they can separate a child from his or her parents for the rest of their lives. God in His wisdom is setting forth here a condition that is absolutely essential if Israel is to be able to honor the previous condition that the Lord set down of acknowledging no other gods, and to maintain an undivided heart of devotion to Him.

Even a casual reading of the historical books of the Old Testament clearly reveals a blatant disregard for this condition that the Lord laid down for His going before to rout out the nations. Especially by the time that we get to the establishment of the monarchy in Israel, we find intermarriage with the surrounding nations commonplace. We also witness very sobering consequences for God's chosen people. They began to worship the gods of those with whom they intermarried. They complied with the rites and demands of those foreign gods. The Hebrew people stooped to engaging in some horrific practices, such as sacrificing their own children upon the altars of these gods. The result of all of this was that Israel's heart was turned from the Lord their God to the gods of the nations. They were severely compromised in their devotion to God Almighty.

The result of this compromise was devastating for the nation of Israel. They would later become divided into two nations—a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. Their consciences became increasingly seared as they fell more deeply into the clutches of these foreign peoples and their practices. The anger of the Lord was stirred to such an extent that He proclaims through His prophet Jeremiah that He has given Israel (the northern kingdom) a bill of divorce (Jeremiah 3:6-8). The result was that northern Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians, never to come together as a nation again. Jeremiah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah, and was God's mouthpiece to warn Judah of what was in store for them if they followed the same path. Judah did not repent and it, too, was taken into captivity, not by the Assyrians but by the Babylonians, where they remained in exile for 70 years. Indeed, we see something of the Lord's compassionate heart when he urges Judah to proclaim His word through Jeremiah to backsliding Israel that if she repents, He will return unto her (Jeremiah 3:12).

Israel's whoredom with the gods of the peoples around them was a direct result of their taking wives from these nations, directly in violation of God's command not to do so. God knew the power that these relationships would have over these people which is why He commanded that they remain separate and undefiled by the surrounding nations. As we understand Israel's conundrum through spiritual eyes we will understand that this command to remain separate and to not intermarry with the surrounding peoples applies to us today just as it did to our spiritual forefathers of ancient Israel. This intermarrying can be manifest in many ways and it would behoove us to be alert to the subtle ways in which we might be seduced into these relationships.

We can readily see, of course, one application of this condition for the taking of the Kingdom of Heaven. I am speaking here of not marrying unbelievers or even of becoming emotionally entangled with unbelievers in a way that is likely to lead to marriage. We are clearly told not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). While it is not clear from either the text or the context that marriage is what Paul was referring to here, we can readily understand how such unholy matrimonial bonds will severely compromise the Kingdom agenda that God has for those whom He has called His *cĕgullah*. I am of great certainty that Paul's admonition extends far beyond the institution of marriage. We are not to be unequally yoked in *any* area of our lives because such bonds will compromise us. It is critical that we be very careful as to whom we align ourselves with in business partnerships, in civic commitments, and in other endeavors that involve great investment of our time, resources and energy. I am not suggesting here that we completely separate ourselves from the world, similar to the stance that Old Order Amish and other groups have historically taken. We are, indeed, in the world. But friend, we are not *of* the world, and the way to maintain a purity of heart is to not allow ourselves to become entangled in relationships that would compromise that purity. I must warn you dear fellow traveler, that this is a lonely road if we are to be true to this condition in our day, age and culture.

You may already be involved in such entanglements, and the Lord may be calling you to come apart from those relationships. I recall so clearly a most painful separation that I had to make in the 1990's. I had been asked to serve as the very first president of a newly established Habitat for Humanity chapter in the county in which I lived. I loved the heart of this organization and of the local group of people who came together across race and class lines to "do unto the least of these," and I was incredibly honored to serve in this way. This building of community, I believed then as I do now, is close to the heart of God. There came a time when I knew that it was time to step down as president. Upon my stepping down from this role, and after a brief term as president by a dear brother in the Lord, the local chapter decided to elect as president a very prominent individual in the community who had many connections in the political and business world. Very quickly the atmosphere changed. No longer was there much talk about the importance of building community, or serving the least of these with the heart of Christ. It was now about building *houses*, and building as many of them as we could. It was about putting that local chapter "on the map." It was about getting people into houses so that there could be an income stream to build more houses. I despaired over this, desperately doing what I could to recover something that we had lost. It was then that a very godly woman got me

aside and looked me in the eyes and said, “Chuck, I think you need to pray about whether God would have you let Habitat go.” There was a release within me right then. I knew that I needed to do this, first, because I had made an idol out of Habitat for Humanity and God needed to remove that idol. I also recognize that I needed to do it because I would have been stuck in a mentality of “outer court ministry,”¹⁵ whereas I now understand that God was calling me into something much deeper in Him and in His Kingdom agenda.

There may be other entanglements that the Lord is pressing upon you to release. Some of you may have unholy bonds with your growing up family. I have had opportunity to see close up the dysfunctional dynamics of unhealthy families that keep their members in a perpetual state of anxiety and distraction. Often these are families with a parent or child who is an alcoholic or addicted to other drugs. There develops in these families—or in one or more members of these families—a sick expectation that they must be the one to save or protect the dysfunctional member. Psychologists call this “enabling,” and friend, you are not called to be an enabler. Separate yourself from this role, even if it means experiencing the wrath of that individual or even of other members of your family. Do not allow such an entanglement deter you from that which God has called you.

There is one other type of “intermarriage” that I want to briefly address. I am speaking here regarding the deep soul tie that many of us have to organized religion. I have addressed the problematic nature of organized religion in [Bureaucrurch](#) and of our identity as ones who have been called out of this system in [Ecclesia: Taking Back our Identity](#). Others who are linked to our website have also addressed this issue at length,¹⁶ and books have been written about it, and for this reason it is not my intent to belabor it here. I would only point out that this system, which purports to be “The Church,” demands an allegiance that, at the end of the day, competes with our allegiance to Christ. Oh yes, the preacher will tell you that he is all about leading you to Christ; or that the purpose of the church is to disciple you and nurture within you a greater devotion to Christ. I would urge you to examine the fruit of this by spending some time with those who have been trained in these various traditions of men. Talk to the

¹⁵ I use the term “outer court ministry” to refer generally to ministering to the physical, social and other natural needs of people. This is in contrast to an inner court ministry, which is usually understood as a ministry to the Lord Himself. This distinction is taken from the division of the temple into the outer court, accessible to all of the people and where they could be ministered unto; the holy place, entered into only by priests carrying the sacrifices of the people and conducting ritual worship unto the Lord; and the very inner Holy of Holies wherein only the High Priest would enter, only once each year, to minister directly unto the Lord.

¹⁶ Again, for those of you reading the printed version of this book, the website, and the articles “Bureaucrurch” and “Ecclesia: Taking Back our Identity” can be found at www.wordforthebride.net.

pastors or to the elders. Talk to those who have spent years in those congregations. After a while you will pick up on their loyalty and devotion to their denomination, to their doctrine and theology, and even to their polity or ecclesiastical form. Engage them about your passionate love and devotion to Christ, your bridegroom and the lover of your soul, and you will typically experience an awkward silence in response. I have found that greater purity of the gospel and undivided loyalty and passion for Christ is much more likely to be found in the new convert before he or she has had time to be indoctrinated into the religious system that has the audacity to call itself “the church.”

I am confident that those whom Christ has called out as His *ecclesia* will eventually hear this call to “come out of her, my people” (Revelation 18:4). There is another call, however, to those who have already heeded the call to “come out from among them and be ye separate” (2 Corinthians 6:17), and that is to empty ourselves of the doctrines and beliefs that we have carried over from our time in the religious system. As one has said, “It is one thing to get out of Babylon. It is quite another to get Babylon out of you.” This requires a repentance—a *metanoia*—that involves a radical revolution in our thinking as the Holy Spirit unfolds truths that have been hidden from us by the religious establishment that has, until now, been our primary source of understanding. As the Holy Spirit does this work, our eyes will be open to profound truths that will require us to abandon and even renounce beliefs that we once held dear. This is the separation *within* that must accompany the external physical separation from the religious system.

Conditions for Conquering the Remaining Territory: Summary

God has promised to go before us, to drive out the occupants of the land promised to those who overcome, so that we will indeed inherit and possess the Kingdom of Heaven. It was promised to the Israelites of old and it is promised to us: “*But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even for ever and ever*” (Daniel 7:18). This is God’s promise and He will do it! There are, however conditions that, when met, release the Lord to take out these enemy forces. All of these conditions speak to our undivided loyalty to Him who has captivated our hearts. When we lose courage; when we become distracted by that which is on the right or left; when our ears are dulled to the law of the Spirit as it is spoken within; when our allegiances are turned to other things such as financial prosperity or good health; and when we entangle ourselves in alliances that would turn our hearts from Christ, our first love—God cannot go before us and expel the enemy. He cannot expel the enemy because

when we do these things, we are *embracing* the enemy! I pray that we can see that these conditions are not some legalistic requirement to appease an angry God so that He will move on our behalf. Oh no, dear friend! These are conditions that remove chains that bind us to the slave master of *self*. When met, they open us up to a world of freedom, and unlimited riches in Christ Jesus! They open us up to the conquering of every enemy, and to a life of victorious living! They open us up to our full inheritance, which is the Kingdom of Heaven!

Apportioning the Land

Upon the initial defeat of the 31 kingdoms that occupied Israel's Promised Land, it became necessary to divide the inheritance among the nine and one-half tribes who were its new occupants. (Remember, two and one-half tribes made the decision to remain east of the Jordan in territory that was not included in the Promised Land.) It is noteworthy that when God authorized the dividing up of the land of Canaan among the nine and one-half tribes of Israel, He did not specify the boundaries for each tribe (as He *did* so specify for the overall boundaries of the Promised Land). Rather, He instructed Moses to appoint Eleazar and Joshua, along with a representative from each of the tribes, to define each of the tribes' boundaries (Numbers 34:17). This represents a type of administration of the Kingdom of Israel. The choice of Eleazar and Joshua to define the borders is significant, because Eleazar represents the priestly class and Joshua the kingly class. (Israel had not yet established a monarchy, but Joshua was in the position of leadership that the monarchy represented.) As Israel became more established in the land of Canaan, they began to do evil in the sight of the Lord by intermarrying with the nations around them and worshipping their gods. Israel would be taken into captivity and, responding to their cry for mercy, God raised up a succession of thirteen judges who had authority to deliver them. These judges would lead the nation into war, settle disputes, and make decisions that greatly affected God's people. God also raised up prophets during this time—men who were undivided in their devotion to God—who could hear God's voice clearly and speak it forth with an anointed conviction. The prophets would, of course, take on an even more critical role after the monarchy was established, when Israel was falling into gross disobedience. These two offices—that of the judge (and later the king) and the prophet—were intended to speak forth and implement the word of the Lord to the people. These prophets and judges represented an extension of the leadership that Joshua provided (albeit not always as successfully) during the initial conquest.

The priests were of the tribe of Levi, and, as they did from the time of Moses, performed a dual role. The priest was the intermediary between God and His people. As such, the priest would represent the needs of the people before God and would offer up sacrifices on the people's behalf, as God had instructed. The second part of the priest's role was to represent God to the people. It was the priest who would call the people together for the reading of the law. J. Preston Eby describes this dual role this way:

"...the priest always draws nigh and ministers in TWO DIRECTIONS - drawing nigh to God on behalf of the people and drawing nigh to the people on behalf of God. The priest stands and ministers unto the Lord on behalf of the people while, on the other hand, he ministers unto the people on behalf of the Lord. The ministry of the priest is an intermediate or go-between ministry. He reaches out with one hand and takes hold of God; he reaches out with the other hand and takes hold of humanity; and he brings the two together by virtue of his priestly ministration" (Eby, *The Royal Priesthood*, n.d., Book 1, p. 9).

And so it was that the Lord God would commune with His people through the ministry of the priests. It was not enough, in the economy of God, to simply issue directives and establish rulership and authority. God wanted *relationship* with His people and He established the priesthood from the days of Moses to do this.

Can we see here that by appointing Joshua (the warrior leader) and Eleazar (the priest) to work with the representatives from each tribe to apportion the land, God was establishing an order whereby His Kingdom is being administered by kings and priests unto God? The apportioning of the land has to do with *administration* of the Kingdom of God. Unlike Israel of old, God's kings and priests today are not of a natural lineage. Joshua and Eleazar are but types of a spiritual authority that God has established for the administration of His Kingdom. Indeed, in Christ we find the pattern for both the kingly and priestly authority. His kingly authority was fully realized only after He came to planet earth to serve as our priest. As our high priest, he laid down His very life that we might have the life of God. All the while, He knew that all authority in heaven and earth was His. His submission to the Father led him to a criminal's cross, only to be resurrected, and now ascended to the heavenlies where He sits in a place of authority on the right hand of the Father. The book of Revelation reveals our Lord, not as a babe in a manger or a suffering servant, but as one who rules and reigns.

Remember, Jesus is the *pattern* Son. This means that He has established the pattern for others to follow. Even now, God is raising up priests and kings for

purpose of the administration of His Kingdom. These are men and women who have been separated unto God, who have surrendered themselves to the refining fires of purification and who are being made into the very image of God. These kings- and priests-in-process are almost surely not to be found in the leadership ranks of churches and other ministries. Don't expect to find them there. They do not aspire to such positions. These are a people who have been put on a shelf, humbled before the Lord, so that all self-ambition within them is consumed by fire. Rather than standing tall behind the pulpits of great ministries, they are more likely to be found caring for an ailing friend; speaking a word of divine hope to a fellow inmate at a maximum security prison; or maybe just changing the diaper of an infant or of an incontinent elderly person. The point I wish to make here is that the kings/priests that God is raising up—those whom He is preparing to administer His Kingdom—are in this hour largely hidden, as they are being trained for their *priestly* role. They will remain hidden until God has completed His work in them. Their role in the Kingdom is monumental. It will be these specially prepared ones who are qualified to administer the grace and judgment of God Himself because they have taken on His very character. He can now trust them in this task. As the character of Christ becomes fully formed in them, His will becomes their will, and His desires become their desires. They are becoming qualified to speak forth on behalf of God, even as Joshua did when he ordered the sun and the moon to stand still. These, who following after the pattern of the “Older Brother” and having learned to submit to the will of the Father, will now, by their very words, speak forth life and death, loosing and binding, over those things that have, until now, stubbornly occupied their land of promised destiny. *These* are the priests and kings represented by Eleazar and Joshua!¹⁷

A New Lifestyle

Long before the Israelites came close to Jordan's banks, God spoke to Moses something concerning the lifestyle that they were about to come into upon entering the Promised Land. He tells Moses, in the eleventh chapter of Deuteronomy, that they would not live as they did in Egypt. God's word to Moses

¹⁷ The Aaronic priesthood is a shadow and type of the spiritual priesthood that God is raising in our day. Much can be learned of this preparation process by studying carefully—with spiritual eyes—God's preparation of His Kings and Priests among the Israelite nation. I would strongly encourage the reader to prayerfully read the series by J. Preston Eby entitled [The Royal Priesthood](#). Those reading a printed copy can find Preston Eby's website at www.kingdombiblestudies.org. This series is also available in [audio](#) form on www.wordforthebride.net.

speaks of an entirely new way of living than that which they experienced in Egypt, albeit one that He had been preparing them for throughout their wilderness journey:

“So it shall be, when the LORD your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, “houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full— “then beware, lest you forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage...Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord swore to give your fathers, to them and their descendants, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ For the land which you go to possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered it by foot, as a vegetable garden; but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year (Deuteronomy 6:10-12; 11:8-12; NKJV).

Egypt was a land of hard labor. The Israelites were enslaved to the rule of the Pharaoh and were required to do backbreaking work. They learned there that buildings were going to be made only if they made the bricks; and that crops were going to grow only if they planted and watered them. Nothing was going to be accomplished in that land without the toil of their labor. But God was now bringing them into a new land, “which drinks from the water of the rain of heaven.” This was a land with wells already dug, vineyards and olive trees already planted, and houses and cities already built—for the most part by the hand of their enemies who have been occupying the land! The watering of their crops was no longer dependent upon the man-made irrigation systems that they toiled to create and tend in Egypt, but in this land of promise, God would water and care for their crop; and the scripture says, *“the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.”*

This was a new way of living! Now, rather than depending on the sweat of their own labor and the wisdom of their own minds, they were totally dependent on God alone to water their soil and to ripen their crops. The wilderness provided an apprenticeship period to learn this new way of life, as the Lord provided water from the rock, manna from heaven that they were to gather on a daily basis, and even quail for meat. Despite the amazing supernatural provision that they experienced, the Israelites complained about the monotony of their diet! Little did they know that this was but a foretaste of the dependency upon God for the good things that He had in store for them in the Promised Land. But it was necessary for them to learn to live in this dependence in the wilderness, because when they reached the Promised Land they would face not only physical needs for food and water, but they would encounter major enemies that would also require the Lord their God to go before them.

Oh how long we have lived in Egypt and learned the ways of Egyptian bondage! God has been taking us through our own wilderness as He has been preparing us for that which He has in store for us in the Promised Land. He has been stripping us of all of that in ourselves which we have learned to trust and depend upon to live in the world and slavery of which we have so long been a part. Some of us have had the plug pulled on all of our financial schemes; others have had their good reputations in the community tarnished; still others have lost their marriages. Many of us have come out of religious institutions which have burdened us with all manner of laws and expectations until we literally burned out trying to meet these demands. We have been told that God's work is dependent upon our money and our giving, and many profiteers have been willing to fleece the poorest of their flocks by laying guilt trips upon them followed by hollow promises of great material wealth if they respond to these fundraising schemes. It is true that we are called to partner with God in His great Kingdom endeavor, but our partnership requires only fidelity to the Holy Spirit within us as we respond to His loving call. As Christine Beadsworth has so beautifully put it, *"It is not the lack of money that hampers the extension of the Kingdom, but the lack of surrendered vessels who are willing to say, 'I will go.' Hirelings require gold and silver in order to function in a position of responsibility. A bond servant serves out of love for the master." True shepherds tend the flock and bar the gateway of the sheepfold with their own bodies, just as Jesus said, 'I am the door of the sheep.'"* (Beadsworth, 2017; p. 143).

The religious institution has always depended upon Egyptian-style slavery to maintain its dominant position and tall steeples on the main streets and suburban mega-complexes throughout the communities of our land. Its pharaohs have

fine-tuned their disciplinary actions when the people are not producing enough “bricks.” God is saying to these pharaohs “Let my people go!” just as He did in the days of Moses. If you are one of those “pharaohs” who have by God’s sovereign hand and purpose come across this article (I know there won’t be many, as this is not written primarily to church leaders), and God has been speaking to you through a “Moses” in your congregation—irritating though they may seem to you—to “let His people go,” I would caution you to listen reverently to that message. These that may seem like troublemakers to you are very often messengers sent by God urging you to free His people to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth rather than in the dictates of the organizational demands of the system over which you rule. Choosing to be like the Pharaoh of old who continued to harden his heart, and demand even more of these who speak forth Moses’ call to free His people (or worse yet, vilify them before the rest of your congregation) is to open yourself and your congregation to God’s wrath. Pharaoh of old didn’t escape this wrath and neither will you.

God is tenderly but firmly calling to those caught in this enslavement to religious institutions, “Come out of her, my people.” This will not be a mass exodus in response to a directive from some charismatic leader. As was Joshua, Moses was a type of Christ, and the call of our Lord in this new day of the Spirit is deeply personal, largely hidden from the masses and certainly hidden from the pharaoh’s of the religious monolith under which they have served. They are hearing the call, one by one, to come out. They are usually misunderstood and often vilified. But their hearts are set on obedience to their Lord. A wilderness awaits them, as they are stripped of all of the positive reinforcement that would authenticate their own “goodness.” It is, indeed, a call to a radically new lifestyle.

Whichever wilderness path that God has taken you, it has been tailor-fitted to complete God’s preparatory work for your entry into and possession of your place of destiny. He is bringing you to a place where you are dependent upon *none* of your own resources, where you come to recognize your total dependence upon *His* provision—financial, social, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. He is watering our land with the rain of heaven, and His eyes are upon it from the morning dawn to the setting sun. Our God has been training us to walk totally by His Spirit, moving only when He says move and speaking only that which He puts within our mouths to speak. This is a totally new way of living. For most of us, this will require a major shift in our understanding of God, His *ecclesia*, and who we are in His great Kingdom agenda. This paradigm shift is nothing short of the new wineskin that is necessary to contain the new wine that God is even now beginning to pour forth.

We have identified the conditions that God set forth as part of His covenant with Israel that He would go before them in battle; and we have considered the spiritual significance of these conditions for us as we enter, possess and occupy the Kingdom of God, that land of promise that God has destined for us. We have reflected on the new lifestyle that is part and parcel of living in this new land. The simple fact is, the old lifestyle to which we are so accustomed is totally incompatible with Promised Land living! Let us humbly go before the Lord and beseech him to identify all of the old ways of Egypt that remain within us, so that in every situation and opportunity His will is done and His Kingdom comes! Let us victoriously move forth in the reality of the land that He has taken possession of in us...on our "earth"... and to impose the Kingdom, or the very will of the Father "as it is in Heaven." Let us repent, for His Royal Majesty approaches and the Kingdom of God is at hand!

CHAPTER 6: LIFE IN OUR PROMISED LAND

We have, in the previous chapters, followed the children of Israel from their time in Egypt, through their wanderings in the wilderness, and their entry into and possession of the Promised Land. Throughout this discussion we have examined the spiritual reality of this sojourn, and have understood that their journey is *our* journey. It is long, and often difficult, but it is a sojourn that God Himself has ordained for those who would go on to be the first fruits, and who would co-reign with Christ in this Kingdom that God is establishing. This chapter moves slightly away from the theme of following the children of Israel through their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Here, rather, we seek to take a little closer look at the terrain of that which is *our* Promised Land. We must understand just who we are, and how we are to function in this land of promise, the Kingdom of God. To be sure, we see through a glass darkly in many ways, and for this reason, much of what is in this chapter is somewhat speculative. My prayer is that the thoughts in this chapter will help to stimulate an internal dialogue within you, in the depths of your spirit, which the Holy Spirit will then use to reveal to each of you vast realities of His Kingdom in your life. You will not find those vast realities here. What you will find here are, as said the blind man whom Jesus had made but the first installment of his healing: “Men (seen) as trees walking.” My prayer is that out of this rather blurred and incomplete image, God will bring his corrective lens to the heart of each reader that the focus might become sharper.

I believe that we are in a transition time, as God is now bringing His people from what many have called the “church age” into what would appropriately be called the “kingdom age.” This is nothing short of a transition from one dispensation to another; a change from one governmental order to another; indeed, a transformation from an old economic order based on scarcity, merit and earned rewards based upon the sweat of man’s brow, to an altogether new and revolutionary economic order based on the plenitude of one who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Dispensational transitions have happened before, as with the coming of Christ, the Anointed One, the dispensation of law came to an end and a new dispensation characterized by the indwelling righteousness of Christ through the Holy Spirit was instituted. This new dispensation did not negate the law; rather, it represented the fulfillment of the law in and through Christ. It is nothing short of stunning to me that vast numbers of those who claim the name of Christ, including many Christian leaders, still demand strict adherence to that old covenant of an earlier dispensation.

We are now at the cusp of yet another dispensation in the Lord's great calendar. It is a dispensation of the "kingdom age." As was the case when the age currently waning was ushered in by our Lord Jesus Christ, this age of the Kingdom of God is not a negation of any prior time in God's calendar. Rather, that mission that Jesus came to earth to accomplish *has* been fulfilled—or largely fulfilled—and we are now confronted with a new spiritual time and reality. It is being fulfilled, I would humbly suggest, by those who "*fill up in [their] flesh what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for the sake of His body, which is the church*" (Colossians 1:24, NKJV). By taking up their own cross in radical obedience to Christ, this faithful remnant of sons down through the ages has been and continues to bring to fulfillment the mission of Christ in our day. It is this faithful remnant who is growing up to full stature into the likeness of their head, Jesus Christ.

Contrary to what the church has maintained throughout much of its 2000 year history, the purpose of that which we have called the "church age" has *not* been to "win the world for Christ." Millions, yes billions, of souls have gone to the grave without the experience of being born again of the spirit, and countless millions die in this state every single year. If this were the purpose of the church age, I would have to assume that the overwhelming majority of the world today would be naming Christ as their Lord. This is certainly not the case. It is my belief, rather, that God's purpose in this age now drawing to a close, has been to separate a small remnant unto Himself, and to forge and maintain an authentic faith within this band of faithful followers who will continue to pass the torch of the flame of His love, serving as faithful kings and priests in the Kingdom of God that is even now being established in their hearts. Committed to going the way of the cross, this remnant has been purged, scoured, refined and has suffered persecution and all manner of tribulation. Those comprising this remnant—including most of you who are reading this book—have allowed themselves to be taken through these experiences *willingly*, having counted the cost so as to be emptied of all self-life. There is every evidence that this work of God has been taking place in a small body of men and women throughout the "church age," and continues today on an even greater level, though this remnant is not readily recognized but by those who are given by grace to see and relate through spirit eyes and hearts.

The remnant is not found behind the pulpits of "successful" ministries; nor are they television hosts on Christian television stations. Indeed, they can scarcely be found as *guests* of such programs. For most, there will never be a book written about them; nor will their selfless acts be brought to the world's attention. Increasingly, these called out ones are finding themselves outside the walls of

organized religion. This is not because they have been disillusioned with God and questioning their faith. Quite the contrary, it is because their deepening relationship with God and His Son Jesus Christ has *compelled* them to leave. Many of them have been persecuted because of their leaving; some have been called heretics; nearly all have been greatly misunderstood by their fellow parishioners and leaders because these self-appointed judges can only perceive and then judge through a carnal understanding that comes through natural reasoning. Yet, through all of this, these have entered into this lonely place knowing that God is doing a hidden work of grace that they have been chosen to be part of, and praise God, they endure knowing this very persecution is to teach them to rejoice in the loving preparation for their reward. Indeed, it is part of the training ground for the role that these faithful administrators-to-be of the Kingdom of God will be playing. They will be attached to Christ alone as their true head. And so it is that this “Kingdom age” will be characterized by the attachment of Christ, the true head, to His true body, the remnant of His overcomers.

This remnant, dear friend, is you and me. We have heard the gentle whisperings of the Holy Spirit of God, gently—and sometimes forcefully—calling us to a higher place in Him that even our closest loved ones do not understand. But we have known that we can do nothing other than respond obediently to that call. We are part of that great cloud of witnesses, that part of the remnant who has gone on before, who also were not understood in their time. They are urging us on to finish this race to maturity, as they will not come to perfection apart from us. With this in mind, let us explore our land of promise in greater detail. There are, specifically, three aspects of the Kingdom of God that we will briefly consider in this chapter. The first is what I would call the “economy” of the Kingdom of God. The second aspect is the “government” of the Kingdom. Finally, we will consider the “lifestyle” of the kingdom of God.

The Economy of the Kingdom of God

The economy of any nation or society has to do with the distribution of goods and services, and the mechanisms in place to bring about that distribution. There are two primary philosophies, with several subtle variations, upon which this distribution is based. A capitalist economy is based on the principle of self-interest and a maximization of individual freedom to pursue economic interests unfettered by interference from outsiders, particularly government regulations. Individual freedom in the economic sphere is the ultimate “good” to be pursued under this economic philosophy. Communist societies, by contrast, are based

upon the utopian ideal of maximizing the collective good, epitomized by the communist adage, “from each according to their means, to each according to their needs.” This slogan provides the philosophical basis for government ownership of all of the means of production and distribution of goods in society so as to insure that all members of society are provided at least a minimal level of goods and services to survive and function in a humane way. There are also variations of these two extreme philosophies, such as socialism, which allows for private ownership of property, but which exerts varying degrees of government control as to how that private property is managed. Socialist societies are characterized by high levels of government regulations, and typically, overt government ownership and/or control of sectors of the economy which are considered critical to social well-being. Economic sectors such as public transportation, health care and education are maximally controlled if not outright owned by government entities in socialistic societies.

We know, of course, that none of these economic “types” has been able to function in pure form. The most extreme capitalistic societies have had to compromise their ideals by imposing regulations and enacting anti-trust legislation because some businesses became so big that they were able to monopolize certain economic sectors, thereby eliminating competition which is so vital to a capitalist ideal. Similarly, communist societies have found themselves floundering with a fatalistic and unmotivated workforce because of lack of personal motivation, and have found it necessary to provide capitalistic-style incentives for their workforce. These accommodations have been necessary because both economic systems, in their pure form, are based upon an idealistic conception of human nature that, apart from the redemptive, transformative work of God that takes place through His rigorous processings, is incapable of providing the utopian society these economic philosophies envision.

So what does this all have to do with the economy of the Kingdom of God, our land of promise? We must first recognize that we—we, who are being processed, pruned, and honed by the severe dealings of God into mature sons—are part of these economic systems, even while at the same time living in the reality of a Kingdom economy. This is the principle of being *in* the world, but not *of* the world (John 17:15-16). There is certainly a way in which we are subject to the principles of the economic systems of this world of which we are a part. (This is also true of the government of the Kingdom of God, as we shall see below.) Nevertheless, the Kingdom economy transcends these earthly economies, and serves as the economy within that truly guides what we do and say. This can be illustrated by the testimonies of convicts in maximum security prisons, who report

that after coming to Christ they experience more freedom, even when in solitary confinement, than they ever knew on the outside! They are subject to the physical confinement of their world around them, but they are living in another world of freedom which is within. We also see this principle demonstrated in an event in the lives of Jesus and his disciples. The tax collectors came to Peter and asked if his teacher (Jesus) paid taxes. Peter came to Jesus about this question. Jesus asked Peter if the kings demanded taxes from their own children or from the children of others? Jesus was suggesting that he (and Peter) were the King's sons—the sons of God—and hence were really free from the economic constraints of that tax system. Nevertheless, so as not to cause them offense, Jesus told Peter to go to the lake, cast his hook, and open the mouth of the first fish he caught. There, he would find a coin with which to pay both Peter's and Jesus' tax due to Caesar (Matthew 17:24-27). Jesus lived by another economy which transcended the meager economy of first-century Palestine—even though as a man he lived and walked within that natural economy as well. Many have understood this encounter to mean that Jesus was bound by the tax laws of Rome, and that He merely caused a coin to appear in the mouth of the fish so as to fulfill the demands of that law. Not so. Jesus could have written on the records of the tax collectors "paid in full" by His and Peter's name on the tax rolls. He could have caused the tax collectors to simply not notice that their taxes were not paid. The truth is, Jesus *chose* to demonstrate His transcendence and rulership over the economy of His day by teaching Peter to humbly receive the provision of His Father by causing a coin to appear in the mouth of the fish. He hid Peter in the world by allowing him to operate as a citizen in the world, while at the same time not receiving the provision to do this of or from the world.

Let us understand this brief encounter through spiritual eyes, as this was not simply an historical event in the life of Peter—any more than the journey from Egypt to Canaan was merely an historical event in the lives of the ancient Israelites. When we do this, there are some important lessons to be learned as we consider the nature of the economy of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom Economy is a Spiritual Economy

We understand that we live in a material world wherein the exchange of goods and services is enacted in a material way, typically through money. Jesus confirmed this reality when he told Peter to cast his hook and bring in the fish wherein would be the money to pay taxes unto Caesar. But there was another reality exemplified in this incident with Jesus and Peter. This reality is that the spiritual trumps the material! You don't just find coins in the mouths of fish every

time that you reel one in. This was, to the natural world, a supernatural act of God. There was nothing “super” natural about this in the realm of the Spirit, however. This was, in the words of Watchman Nee, “the normal Christian life” in the realm in which Jesus was operating. The point I wish to make is this: we are called to live in *that* realm. Our physical existence is most certainly in the realm of the material world; but the reality which is to govern our thoughts, our wills, our decisions, our very outlook on life and the reality that we see in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, is that of Spirit. When untoward circumstances befall us, we can, in this place, be certain that even the worst of such circumstances are ordained by God, and will work to accomplish His purpose in us.

I am moved to share the story of a relative of mine, whom I have come to know in the Spirit as a true brother in recent years. He lost his farm, and with this, all basis for self-respect that the world would have to offer. During this process of going through bankruptcy, he hired an attorney who had the reputation of being one of the most crusty, hardened attorneys in that community. This man was materialistic in every way, and was used to winning cases for his clients through his aggressive tactics. This time these efforts did not work. Through all of this, however, my dear relative came into a very personal relationship with this man, one in which he was able to share the basis for his hope in the midst of all of the tribulation that he was experiencing. Before it was all over, this hardened lawyer was reading his Bible and speaking forth truths found in that word. God was accomplishing something very deep within the heart of this man, something that could not have occurred had it not been for the testimony of one beleaguered client who understood that he lived in another realm in which God had total control. That man came to have such child-like faith that he believed for healing of cancer that was attacking his body. His cancer shrank, and that hardened lawyer is now bonded in love with Christ. The farm is lost. But my dear relative and brother in Christ is now entering into a new freedom he had never before known, and yet another soul has been introduced to the reality of the Kingdom of God. Praise the Lord.

We become fixated on material well-being. Alas, many well intentioned (and not-so-well intentioned) preachers of health and wealth only promulgate this fixation as they proclaim that God intends extravagant prosperity for the faithful. We have been promised that our material *needs* will be met. Jesus said, in the Sermon on the Mount, to “seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). What are “these things?” He was not referring to name it and claim it prosperity.

He was referring to their *needs*—what they would wear, and what they would eat and drink. He was, indeed, speaking forth the principle that as we live in that realm of the Spirit (seeking first the Kingdom of God), our material needs will be met. Let me say this as clearly and emphatically as I can: *Our real task is to not worry about the material needs of our body at all, but know that HE will tend to these if we will take care of His Kingdom business!*

We are, however, promised an *abundant* life. Let us understand that this abundance is, first and foremost, a *spiritual* abundance. Our promised land is exemplified by faith, confidence, peace, freedom and joy in the Holy Spirit. Our circumstances cannot diminish this abundance one bit. It is the purpose and intent of the thief to steal, kill and destroy. In the midst of all that might be brought against us, Jesus proclaims that He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). You see, the promised-land lifestyle means that our focus is less and less on our material reality and more and more on that reality of Spirit which is our true substance. The cares of life and material comforts begin to wane in importance and in the burden they would create as we live in the reality of our true inheritance in Him. And in all of this we have the assurance that our material needs are being met as well. We can count on Matthew 6:33 as the proclamation that our needs *already* have been met in the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. We can take that and deposit it in the Bank of Eternity!

The Kingdom Economy is Based on the Principle of Abundance, Not Scarcity

All economies in the world of which I am aware are premised upon the reality that there is a limited supply of material resources to be divided among the members of the population of a given society. The pie is of a given size, and the bigger the piece that one person gets, the less there is for others. Any solution to the problem of poverty, for example is to either (1) redistribute the pieces of the pie; and/or (2) find ways to cut waste; and/or (3) find ways to make the pie bigger. Even as we find ways to make the pie bigger, however, current economies of the world operate according to the principle of scarcity—the supply is not unlimited.

The Kingdom of God operates according to a different economy. This is an economy of *abundance*, not scarcity. The basis for this economy is that God Himself is unlimited, and He commands the resources of an infinite universe that He has brought into being. Those whom He has called as a first fruit company to take possession and occupy this land of promise, He will provide for out of His vast resources. The psalmist declares,

For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine (Psalms 50:10-11).

The truth is, if He is our inheritance, and if He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, then we, too, own the cattle on a thousand hills! All of the resources of God's created world are available to us according to His good purpose, as we yield and submit to Him.

Living according to the principle of abundance will require a drastic change of mindset (a *metanoia*, a repentance) if we are to operate as Kingdom people. We must recognize, first, that *none* of the resources that God has already so graciously bestowed upon us are rightfully *ours*. We must recognize that there is nothing in ourselves that merits these resources. Our hard work, sowing, or reaping will not ever merit or is even necessary for our material needs to be met. Neither our clean living, our attending church services, paying tithes or giving to the poor will merit our spiritual gains. Likewise, neither our wise investments or prudence with finances—indeed, absolutely *nothing* of ourselves or our efforts—has claim to any rights over the resources which God has given us. Second, we must understand that God's economic principles are higher than ours. God gives, or does not give as He wills, according to *His* divine purpose, not according to our felt needs. Our job is simply to align ourselves with His Kingdom purposes. Jesus said, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33). We will find that as our wills become conformed to His will, that our needs will be met and then some!

Finally, we must learn to enter into His Sabbath rest. Knowing that He cares for even the birds of the air who neither sow nor reap (Matthew 6:26), we have no cause for fretting; for how much more does He care for us. We are called to that place of rest in Him in which we have peace regardless of the circumstances that swirl around us. This rest, into which we are called to enter, is of greater value than all of the material resources that we could possibly amass. This Sabbath rest is of greater value than the security provided by a massive savings account, a lucrative retirement, the best political connections, or any other security that the economies or systems of this world can possibly provide. Indeed, this is a peace that endures while we are in the midst of all manner of difficult circumstances. It endures, because it is His peace, a peace unlike anything the world can give. It is this peace that Jesus promised his disciples (and us) that He would give—a promise made at a time when they were surely troubled as Jesus was preparing them for His death and His eventual return to the Father (John 14:26-27). As we

enter into His Sabbath rest, all that we do and say comes from a place of faith and confidence that *all* that He has ordained in and through us will come to pass. His abundance is our reality, and there is no circumstance that can deter us from the confidence that He will provide amply to us, who are called according to His purpose.

All of this has profound implications for how we respond to the challenges that we face. Rather than frenetically considering whether we have the resources, our first consideration is only the quickening of our spirit giving witness that God is calling us to such an endeavor, trusting Him to provide any necessary resources. Rather than trying to figure out “why” or “how” we are to respond to the call of God in our lives, not moving forward until it “makes sense” to our carnal minds, we simply move, without any rational sense made of our obedience being required.

Some years ago, my wife and I both sensed that the Lord was directing us to travel on a motorcycle. I had scarcely ever ridden on a motorcycle, and now, at age 60, I was supposed to ride around the country on a motorcycle? We did not understand why. We did not see any purpose in it, nor did we perceive anything of consequence resulting as we sought to understand why it was that God was calling us out. Within a year, we knew that we would have to go to a larger, touring motorcycle at some cost because the distances we were traveling were becoming much greater. We would often get discouraged because we were not seeing or understanding the purpose in all of this. Any expectations for what that purpose there might be were mostly defied. We did experience some incredible encounters with the Lord, even as we rode, as God spoke to us through what might seem to be the most trivial of things—the formation of the clouds, butterflies, animals, and even the smells that we took in. Occasionally, we would encounter people with whom we felt led to speak to or pray. But still, what was the purpose in all of this? We still do not understand His purpose, beyond the fact that we know that He takes great joy as we interact with Him during these times. We will, in all likelihood, be heading out again next year, with our carnal minds little more informed than when we began nearly eight years ago. We do not usually know where we will end up when we start out. Nor do we know why. Nevertheless, until we are checked within our spirit that we are not to venture out in this way, we know that we must continue.

I also recall the testimony of a young man and his wife, recently apprehended by the Lord from a lifestyle of drug use. They knew that they were to travel from Arizona to North Carolina, the purpose of which I do not remember. They shared

how they had no money, and their tires were already so bald that they could see the steel belt coming through. Nevertheless, they left in obedience to the voice of the Spirit. Their victorious report was that after nearly 5000 miles, they could still see the steel cords in their tires after they got home, but they did not have a single flat!

There is a freedom in such obedience, because we know that we do not have to understand. Nor do we have to worry about being “right” before we do whatever we do in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We can risk being wrong or misled. Indeed, the only “wrong” response is to ignore that prompting, whether it is to “go forth” or to “stay put.” God’s purpose is being accomplished, and He will provide the necessary resources. Indeed, even if we have misinterpreted that prompting of His Spirit, we can rest in knowing that He honors our obedience anyway, and He will be faithful to speak to us in a manner that we *can* hear clearly.

And so it is, that in this economy of abundance, we move forth in faith and confidence in response to what we hear the Father saying and doing in our lives. We trust *His* provision rather than *our* resources. We rest in the assurance that He who is in us is greater than He who is in the world. We *know* that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and who are called according to His purpose.

The Kingdom Economy is About Giving and Receiving

Economies of the world depend upon markets wherein goods and services are bought and sold; matters not whether these are capitalist or communist economies. The primary difference between these two economic philosophies is who owns and/or controls the goods and services being exchanged. That being exchanged in communist societies is largely owned and/or controlled by the government, whereas capitalistic economies seek to minimize governmental control, putting the ownership and control over economic exchanges in the hands of the individual.

Virtually all activities in Christendom today conform blindly to the economic principles of whichever economy in which they are embedded. Go to most “ministry” websites, and you will find books, CD’s, webinars, and all matter of Christian paraphernalia being hawked at top market prices. TV ministries are marketing cruises at top dollar, as they are but a pawn of the cruise lines for which, in return, they get a cut of the take. Even local churches operate according to this mentality. While for most, the “offering” is still voluntary, one church in

our community requires one's checking account number on the application for membership. Presumably, this simply makes it easier to "give" by simply indicating how much the member wants deducted from his or her checking account each week. And just about all churches preach the importance of the tithe, and use that doctrine to pressure people to give to the upkeep of the bureaucratic organization, even if their heart is not moved by the Spirit of God to give. I am not, in this chapter, going to address the arguments pro and con of extending the Old Testament command and practice of the tithe, except to say this: the tithe is part and parcel of the Old Testament law that has now been fulfilled in Christ. We are not to give out of obligation to a law any more than we are to come under the bondage of the law in any other area of our lives. We have been freed from the bondage of the law! Rather, we are called to give AND receive as we are so moved by the Holy Spirit.

I want to, in the next few paragraphs, highlight what I see to be at least the broad contours of what this might look like as we apply this principle of giving and receiving in our daily Kingdom walk. First, I would emphasize that this giving and receiving is for the purpose of building and advancing the Kingdom of God. It is not to support the perpetuation of a ministry or organization. Such organizations have already conceded to the economies of the world by the simple fact that they have organized in this way in the first place—complete with 501(c)3 status to lure members and others into "giving" so that they can use it as a tax break! This is to say nothing of the Madison Avenue inspired strategies to "encourage" people to support their organizational infrastructure. Rather, we are to give when we are compelled from within to give. This may be in response to a perceived need of a neighbor, friend, or total stranger. I want to make it clear here that I am *not* suggesting, simply, that we give in response to need. There is no end to needs that we may encounter. Not all of them are ours to respond to, and God may be doing something very critical in the life of that person, a work that we would interfere with if we were to give at that time. I have had some very critical needs come to my attention that I knew that I could not respond to for one reason or another. I would suggest, however, that whenever we are confronted by needs of those around us, it would behoove us to search our hearts, and listen intently to the Spirit of God for how we respond. We may be moved to give financially. The Lord may give us a word of encouragement. We may even be called upon to be involved in the life of that person far beyond the need that we perceive, as the Holy Spirit reveals deeper needs in their lives. Or, we may be convicted to walk away, even at the risk of jeopardizing our relationship with that individual. The bottom line here is that we give only in response to the Spirit's directive to give,

without any thought to what this giving will mean for us financially or otherwise. There will be blessings, but not always—not even usually—in the manner in which we would expect. There is, above all, the blessing of knowing God’s pleasure in our obedient hearts that give out of love to our King.

Prosperity preachers are especially adept at enticing people to give with the promise that “God will bless you tenfold, sixtyfold, even an hundredfold!” These promises are often accompanied by a token gift which is to serve as some magical power in the life of the giver to keep them expecting their miracle from God. I remember so clearly as a child the experience of my father, who was normally quite prudent and wise in his giving, during a time of financial testing. He gave to a radio preacher who promised great return on his gift. In return, my father was sent a cheap wallet, which he was instructed to place in a very prominent place where he could always see it, and to keep it opened as a sign of his faith that God was going to bless him financially. So, for many weeks, whenever I went into his bedroom, I would see this wallet, open, prominently positioned on the top of his dresser. The wallet stayed empty all those weeks, and I never saw any miraculous appearance of money in any other wallet either! God was, however, always faithful to supply my family’s needs.

God’s Kingdom economy demands that we give without consideration of our means to give (and here, I am preaching to myself).¹⁸ If God has directed it, He will provide it. It is not ours to worry about where these resources will come from. We limit God’s ability to give through us, and work through us generally, because we operate on the basis of this-world’s economy. We operate on the principle of scarcity, and give according to the paltry sum of money that we can see in our bank accounts. Our God would have us know, as inhabitants of the Kingdom of God—our Promised Land—that the resources here are more than equal to the demands that He places upon us.

Just as our giving is to be led by the Spirit, so is our receiving. The professional Christian ministries of today provide an absolutely horrible model for how it is that we are to receive God’s provision. Their model is one of slick advertising, with glossy monthly magazines and targeted mail and email campaigns which

¹⁸ I say that I am preaching to myself because I am, in the natural, very careful with money. This can be a very virtuous characteristic, as untold millions of people find themselves in financial ruin because of a careless attitude toward finances. This very virtue, however, can easily become a bondage as we (those like me) are prone to base our financial decisions (including giving) *totally* on what we can “afford” as we calculate this in our natural minds. We are not able to trust God for the resources—even when He directs it! For those with a natural mindset such as mine, we need a real repentance—a *metanoia*.

attempt to “sell” the “mark”¹⁹ on what a worthy organization they are, often with a promise that they will receive an even greater material reward in return. Alternatively, they will show pictures or videos of humanitarian work that they are allegedly conducting in some third world country, with close ups of the desperate or sunken eyes of starving children, all in an attempt to overwhelm the emotions of potential givers. All of these strategies are drawn straight from Madison Avenue. These ministries are not receiving according to Kingdom principles, and I do not believe that it is a stretch to say that of these, Jesus said, “They have their reward” (Matthew 6:2).

The Kingdom model that Jesus established for receiving was very different. He told His disciples,

“And as ye go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.”
(Matthew 10: 7-14).

There are several principles for receiving that Jesus establishes here. First, our focus is to be on the Kingdom business for which we have been sent. “As you go [preach that] the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers...” etc. He did not say, “First, raise all of the money that you will need to accomplish this mission before you leave Jerusalem...” Indeed, He told them to bring no gold or silver (or even extra coats or shoes)!

Second, we are to go forth with the clear assurance that God will provide our needs. We do not bring all of these added resources—why? “For the workman is worthy of his meat.” And as we go, and encounter others, in our exchanges with them (our saluting them) we determine whether they are worthy. The Greek word for “worthy” in this passage is *axios*, and is the same word that is used when

¹⁹ The term “mark” comes from the subculture of the underworld, and refers to someone who is seen as an easy prey for a pickpocket or a con artist.

Jesus said that anyone who does not take up his cross and follow Him is not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:38). It carries the idea of having weight, and in particular, having the weight of another thing of like value. So, in essence, Jesus was telling his disciples that, in their encounters with others, they were to discern their “weightiness” in matters of the Kingdom. Are these individuals who have a spiritual hunger for the Kingdom? Are they open to receiving their Kingdom message? Are they able to receive the things they (the disciples) have to say? Indeed, are they *axios*—worthy, of Kingdom weight—to receive this good news? If so, these are the people that you are to stay with. If not, go elsewhere, and if there is no one in this town of such weight, shake the dust from your feet and leave that town.

Notice that Jesus did not say, “Look for someone who you think would be willing to support your ministry.” No. He told His disciples to discern whether the households to which they came were *of Kingdom weight*. Jesus knew and understood that if the hearts of the inhabitants of these homes and cities were open to the message of the Kingdom—*worthy*—they would be inclined to care for the material needs of His messengers.

Never once in this, or any of the parallel passages of this account in the gospels, did Jesus tell his disciples to *ask* for money or resources. This is simply a matter about which Jesus was silent because He knew that our provision is not dependent upon our appealing to others for money. There may indeed be times that we are moved to ask for money, but this must be done only at the command of the Holy Spirit. More importantly, I believe that the important lesson that we are to take from this passage is that we are to depend upon His provision, not our own resources or strategies, for our material needs as we cooperate with Him in advancing His Kingdom here on earth.

All of this, to be sure, comprises a very different economic model than that which most of us are accustomed. We must work out, with much sensitivity to the Spirit of God, what this means in our specific situations. There are no cookie-cutter formulas that can be applied. Coming into the glorious reality of Kingdom economy living is a process, and the good news is that God will be faithful to show us—in ways that we can clearly understand if our hearts are set on obedience to Him—what those specifics mean for us in any given situation. Let us rejoice in the adventure of the Promised Land economy set before us!

The Government of the Kingdom of God

I am indebted to Preston Eby, and particularly his series, *The Royal Priesthood* for many of the thoughts presented in this section. Indeed, as the government of the Kingdom of God is so eloquently presented there, I would urge the reader to read that series. Here, I will simply consider some of the basic principles of this government for our day in as practical a way as possible.

Who Shall Govern?

Scripture is very clear, both in the Old Testament and the new, that Christ will ultimately rule victoriously over all of his creation.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7).

“Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” (1 Corinthians 15:24-25).

These, and an abundance of other scriptures, demonstrate clearly that Christ shall indeed govern, and I know of no one naming the name of Christ who would dispute this. But just who is this Christ who shall govern? Contrary to what is taught (or at least implied) throughout the church system today, this Christ is not merely the “historical” Jesus who will someday descend through the clouds of our physical atmosphere and set His physical feet on the Mount of Olives (a teaching taken largely from the description in Zechariah 14:4). We must understand that Jesus, who walked the dusty roads of Galilee was but the firstborn of a many-membered company of sons who are the corporate body of Christ. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:27 that *we are* the body of Christ. Jesus Himself, calls forth this body in His powerful prayer to the Father just before going to the cross:

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them;

that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”
(John 17: 21-23).

We are one with Christ, even as He is one with the Father. Jesus, the Christ, is the head and we are in Him and He is in us, the body (see also Ephesians 5:23 and Colossians 1:18, among others).

And so it is that *we*, under His headship and authority, are the administrators of His government of the Kingdom of God! *We* are the body of Christ, and so when Isaiah says that the government shall be upon His shoulders, I would ask: Are the shoulders part of the head? Or the body? Friend, as part of the corporate body of Christ, the government shall be upon *us*, the shoulders of the corporate body of Christ. I must be very clear, however, that not everyone who claims to be a follower of Christ is part of His body. Dear reader, the body of Christ, who is destined to rule with Him, consists of those who have surrendered all, who have laid down their life to take up their cross, who have been willing to undergo all manner of suffering, and who have been willing to endure the refining fires that are intended to bring them to mature sonship. Having endured all of this, the true body of Christ, attached to Christ, the Head collectively has the mind of Christ through His Holy Spirit, and with this mind, are fit to rule and to reign in the Kingdom that He is now establishing.

How Shall We Govern?

The Kingdom of God is a different sort of political jurisdiction than the kingdoms or nation-states we know today. It is a *spiritual* kingdom. Therefore, it is governed by spiritual, not natural principles. This is an important principle missed even by many Kingdom people, and especially by the vast majority of those who claim to be apostles and priests of this Kingdom which God has prepared as our Promised Land. I want to just briefly mention a couple of these important spiritual principles by which we are called to govern.

The first, and preeminent principle by which the Kingdom of God is governed is *love*. Everything that God does is motivated by His love, which is His essential character (1 John 4:8, 16). Therefore, we, who co-reign with Christ, are motivated by this same love in all that we do. This motive is radically unlike the governing authorities of this world, who rule out of a motive for power, or even the altruistic motive of wanting to make the world a better place, where beneath even this honorable motive, is the desire for self-aggrandizement and promotion. The love

with which we are called to rule in this heavenly kingdom, is *His* love. It results in actions that do not seek anything in return. It is motivated, not even by the needs of others, but by the heart of the Father, which is perfect love. It results in laying down our very lives for those around us, as Jesus reminded us (John 15:13), and may be expressed in giving of our money or time with no expectation of anything in return; of engaging in the most lowly and even reprehensible of tasks for another who is not able; or even taking a stand with the unlovely for a cause that might be despised by those we respect the most. All of these are expressions of His love, about which Jesus said, *“Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend”* (John 15:13). And let us remember that Jesus also said, when he was establishing the principles of the Kingdom of God in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” (Matthew 5:43-44).

This love, even for enemies, is *agape*, and the preeminent characteristic of Kingdom governance.

A second principle, which issues forth from love, is governance by *service*. Our part in the governance of the Kingdom of God is not, as we are so accustomed, of having *others* serve *us*. It is a travesty that most of the ministries today—especially big time ministries, but smaller ones as well, and many proclaiming a kingdom message—govern with the secular principle of *lording over*. The very use of titles, such as “Reverend,” “Apostle,” “Doctor,” and “Prophet” among a host of others (and notice that these titles are ALWAYS capitalized) betrays a pecking order in which the holders of these titles make a claim to be at or near the top. Jesus took direct aim at these who would seek position:

“A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.” (Luke 22:24-27).

This is a radically different type of governmental authority in which the unredeemed, and untried and untested, cannot operate. No mixture of the flesh-life can operate consistently in this realm. Within months, weeks, or even days, rule by “lording it over” will rear its ugly head where the work of the cross has not completely done its work. The truth of this is given witness by nearly every ministry that has ever been established in the past 2000 years. Praise God, however, we are witnessing a deeper work of the Spirit taking place in some, as the Spirit of God is humbling them and bringing them into a deeper understanding, in practical and experiential terms, of the work of the cross within them. And oh, what a sweet fragrance they are emitting!

These principles of governance do not make sense in the natural mind. We see all of the crime, violence, corruption and immorality around us, and we cannot fathom a government of love and service. This is because we do not fully and completely understand the nature of love and service! Love is not that which “pets the kitty” of the carnal, bestial man; nor is service that which makes itself available to any soulish whim or need. The man or woman who has been purified by the refining fires of God sees through the carnal needs and wants (and requests and perhaps even demands) of those around them, and with the eyes of the Spirit, apprehends that which *God* sees and responds accordingly. Like Peter we say, “*Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk* (Acts 3:6). These principles of love and service will even at times manifest in speaking a hard word, or possibly withholding something that might seem as good to the natural mind.

As succinctly as I can, let me emphasize that *governance by the principles of love and service is grounded in love and a commitment of service to God Himself, and the furtherance of His Kingdom*. We speak forth Kingdom truth. We carry out Kingdom-enhancing acts. We live lives of devotion to God and His Kingdom purposes. The very acts issuing forth from Christ being free to live His life through His sons, even God’s Christ, bring a powerful message of love and service to the world. These are redemptive acts, whether they look like it to the natural mind or not. They are revolutionary, and will ultimately draw all men unto Christ until every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

The Lifestyle of the Kingdom of God

The manner in which we live our lives in this promised Kingdom is really a function of the nature of the land we now occupy. I want to consider four broad features, as they reflect and show us how we must live in our Promised Land.

Enemies in the Land

We must recognize, first, that we are entering a land which has always been the shared domain of enemy forces. The enemy inhabitants of the Promised Land that Joshua and his forces confronted were but a shadow of the enemy that we confront under the leadership of our Joshua. Paul recognized this enemy when he exhorted the Ephesian believers,

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”.
(Ephesians 6:11-13).

The truth of the matter is that our Promised Land is not some far away pristine land, spiritually or otherwise, that we inherit simply to revel and frolic in without a care in the world. Our Promised Land, the Kingdom which God has prepared for us, is, first and foremost, this very kingdom *which is us*, and which is being transformed by the power of God in us! The enemy that now occupies this land comes against us in many forms. There is persecution and rejection from even our closest friends and family members. Some of us may face confrontation, persecution and even physical incarceration or death at the hands of civil authorities depending upon where we live and upon what God has specifically called us to in His Kingdom agenda. The enemy occupying this land comes more forcefully and effectively, however, within—in those areas of our lives that have not yet been fully surrendered to Christ. We may be harboring an offense or resentment against a loved one for a wrong committed against us many years ago—or only yesterday. We may be, even unconsciously, cultivating racist or sexist attitudes that prevent us from fully embracing our brothers and sisters in Christ and unconditionally loving vast segments of humanity. It may be that the enemy to be conquered in our lives might be fear—fear of financial insecurity, poor health, or simply of being alone. There may be idols in our lives—idols of wealth, position in the community, other individuals whom we have put on a pedestal—which are getting in the way of true intimacy and communion with God. All of these are enemies in our land of inheritance which must be completely routed. Indeed, oftentimes, what we *perceive* as the work of the enemy—the loss of an idolized loved one, our worst fears of financial disaster, or a son or daughter marrying someone of a stigmatized (in our mind) racial or social

class category—is really the work of God Himself presenting an opportunity for us through His Spirit to deal a death blow to these enemies in our land!

And so, we must be prepared for battle as we enter upon this land. I am not speaking here of marching around city hall seven times and claiming it for Christ; nor am I talking about the culture wars of trying to criminalize abortions, get prayer back in public schools, or campaign to elect public officials committed to these things. These things may be appropriate as *God* directs individuals to do them, but these are not the real giants that we face. Our enemy is much more subtle, yet powerful, often coming as an angel of light, and seeks to sap the very life of Christ from us. We must, therefore, put on the full armor of God: being committed to His Truth, regardless how painful that may be in any given situation; forsaking any thought of righteousness in ourselves, claiming His righteousness as our breastplate; being prepared always to move forth in extending the gospel of peace; walking by faith—not by sight or feeling—and standing on His promises when all circumstances suggest otherwise. It is by lifting our shield of faith, knowing the will of God, that we quench the fiery darts of discouragement, anger or discontent; proclaiming our absolute salvation in Him; and speaking forth, with our mouths, His Word of truth. We must be vigilant in this, and understand that this is a Kingdom lifestyle.

Land Flowing with Milk and Honey

When God first described Canaan, the land He had promised to the Israelites, He told Moses:

“For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year” (Deuteronomy 11:10-12).

This Promised Land was of a different type and order than was Egypt, out of which God was delivering them. It was a land of plenty, and it produced independently and apart from any of their efforts to sow and to water. It was a land that *God* tended, and which would supply all of their needs.

As I have said above, just about all economic models today are built upon the assumption of a scarcity of resources (meaning that necessary resources such as food, energy, etc., are limited and potentially exhaustible). This means that if one person gets a bigger piece of the pie, another's piece, by necessity, is diminished. In response to this, much of Christendom is committed to bring about a radical redistribution of the world's wealth. And many of these churches and agencies believe that such redistribution *is* the bringing forth of the Kingdom of God on earth. I certainly do not condemn efforts to bring about a more equitable distribution of the world's wealth. Much of my professional life was devoted to understanding these inequities and searching for solutions. I have now come to understand however, that such efforts are not *Kingdom* efforts, and moreover, the Kingdom of God is not even governed by these economic principles of scarcity.

This Kingdom that God is bringing forth is a land of *plenty*, and a land of *God's provision* that makes any distribution, except *His through us*, not a factor. God's economy takes out the middle man or the worldly economy. He gives through us and to us and we are content to be full or empty, as neither of these define our happiness. God provides in various ways. When we look at the model set forth in that Promised Land of old, one of the striking features is that the Israelites were inheriting a land that was not going to require irrigation, as God promised that *He* was going to water the land with rains from heaven. We are also told that they would come into possession of houses that were already built; of wells that were already dug; and vineyards and olive trees that they did not plant (Deuteronomy 6:11). This is a land, in other words, whose bounty was not dependent upon their labors. God would provide for them out of His abundance, even by the hands of their enemies who had been there before and built the cities and houses, dug the wells, and planted the vineyards and olive trees!

There was a condition on this provision, however; it was conditional upon them keeping His commandments, and teaching them to their children. God was asking them to *tend to His business*, and His provision would flow forth. Jesus himself could not have made it clearer: "*But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33).

The commandments that are ours to keep today are not those of the letter of the law, but rather that which comes from the Spirit of God within. We are called to a place of such communion with Him—yes, even perfect oneness with Him—out of which we recognize His voice and understand His directives.

Boundaries

It was important that God clearly delineate the boundaries of the Promised Land for the children of Israel—lest why would the Spirit of God have gone to such great lengths in scripture to delineate these boundaries? I would suggest that part of the reason is to clearly establish the magnitude that these boundaries encompass in our own land of promise. The children of God today who have heard His call to come “outside the camp,” and who have responded faithfully, do not always understand clearly the boundaries that He has established. We suffer, I believe, in two ways. Most of us are overwhelmed at the immediate skirmishes that we encounter as we face the enemy in our land of inheritance. We fail to see and understand the enormity of the Kingdom of God and frankly, we fail to appreciate the radical and revolutionary nature of this Kingdom. From time to time we are given fresh revelations of this Kingdom and we are blown away by the implications of what we see. Our natural tendency is to undermine these heavenly visions by presumption and reasoning that such is totally beyond our capacity, or that we are simply not being realistic, or that such an idea will be met with opposition or even derision. We reason in this way because our carnal minds have not been fully subjected to the Holy Spirit within. Indeed, to reason with our carnal minds is a strategic ploy by the enemy—to “reason” with us. Surely, if he can reason with us for any length of time at all, that valiant faith that we initially experience when we are given these fresh revelations, is co-opted by the enemy of Christ to be trashed by our carnal minds. Alas, that knowledge of God which was so alive in us moments ago will be aborted as quickly as it came if not gestated by the Spirit.

The other problem with boundaries that some have, is that their zeal carries them far beyond what *God* has established. These may well be given a true vision of the Kingdom that they are to possess, but quickly they get carried away in their zeal to establish ministries which eventually become kingdoms unto themselves. It does not take long for a faithful and spiritually discerning follower of Christ to smell the flesh in these efforts. Those who attempt to establish these boundaries which have not been established by God will inevitably encounter burnout, or even worse, humiliation and shame, because their zeal and avarice has exposed a heart that was not pure. A multitude of ministries have fallen because of a failure to recognize the boundaries that God has set in place.

So what are these boundaries that God has established? They are recognized by those walking in close relationship with the Father. They are always spiritually discerned. When God says “Go,” we go, despite what it might look like to those

around us. When we are checked in saying something, we hold our tongue. This is a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading that is cultivated through experience as we sometimes speak or move out of our flesh, mistaking it for the Holy Spirit. Only in retrospect, perhaps, do we see more clearly what was motivating us. But we learn from those missteps; indeed, these blunders are the very curriculum that God uses to teach us, and to develop that spiritual discernment within us. And as we learn to recognize His voice, and to discern the still small voice of the Holy Spirit as over against all other voices, there is a rest—a Sabbath rest—that we experience as we move forth boldly in that which we know that He has called us to do.

Sabbath Rest

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” (Hebrews 4:9-11).

The writer to the Hebrews is exhorting his readers to do something that is totally counterintuitive. These first-century Christians are facing incredible opposition and persecution. Nothing in their external circumstances suggests that it is time to rest! But this is a *Sabbath* rest. This is a rest that is not based on external circumstances; it is grounded in the knowledge that we have entered the Promised Land; that the Kingdom of God has come, that the King has complete control, and that even in the most dire circumstances of opposition and even martyrdom, our very lives of surrender are the shoulders upon which His government is resting. HE is in control, not us nor the powers of this world. We can face even death when this knowledge is deeply incarnate within us.

On the other hand, if we *fail* to enter into His rest and to cease from our own labors, we are powerless to face the enemy that occupies this land, much less overcome Him. Our victory over the enemy is absolutely dependent upon our resting in the awesome sovereignty of God in every situation that we encounter. We are so accustomed to focusing on what the enemy is doing that we forget that no trial, no temptation, no persecution, no sickness, no financial hardship comes our way except that which the Father has permitted for our good. Yes, even Satan is under God's control. As C.S. Lewis has so aptly put it, “Satan is but God's convenient agent.” When we understand this, we can truly rest, and out of this place of rest in His works through us, we are equipped to conquer the enemy which occupies our land.

I do not suggest that this will be easy. The biggest challenge to my spiritual journey has been learning how to keep my eyes off of my circumstances, and upon the Master of those circumstances. There are many points of stumbling, and our knees get quite chafed. But our Heavenly Father knows our capacity as He orchestrates all of these circumstances in this rigorous School of the Spirit through which He is taking us. We need not stress in the midst of these testings. We only need to, cease our own labors and enter into His rest!

Conclusion: A Call to Rest in His Covenant

I pray that the truths and realities presented in this book will be a catalyst that will launch you into ever deeper and more magnificent dimensions of His Kingdom. He is establishing a Kingdom, dear friends, and we are being refined and purified, shaped and bent, and readied in every way to participate with Him in the governance of that Kingdom! How awesome and humbling is this privilege that is ours.

Such a privilege also carries with it awesome responsibilities as His messengers, His kings and priests, to a world desperately in need of that which He is preparing us to offer. It is a responsibility that requires our humble yieldedness to His Lordship, as His will becomes our will, and His desires become our desires. This entails a letting go of all of that to which we hold tenaciously so as to preserve our self-life. This seems so excruciating when we are first confronted with those things that must be released; there is, however, a freedom that comes as we relinquish these idols which have become obstacles to our full inheritance of the land of promise that He has prepared for us. This freedom is truly a place of Sabbath rest.

I believe that if we were to identify a dominant theme throughout the narrative related to the establishment of the Israelites in *their* land of promise, and the lifestyle that they were called to there, it would be that they were to rest in the adequacy of their God who called them out of Egypt and unto Himself as a peculiar people. He promised to go before them in battle. He promised to send the rains, and to produce the crops. Their only responsibility was to voluntarily enter into the covenant that He was establishing with them, and to be obedient to the terms of that covenant. We know, of course, that they were not faithful to God's covenant with them, and they endured much severe corrective judgment for their unfaithfulness.

Our call is to enter into that same rest:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,'" although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a

certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest." Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:1-11; NKJV).

Entering into God's rest is a *command*, not an option! We enter into this rest with *diligence* (v. 11). The King James renders it that we *labor* to enter this rest. This seems like a contradiction at first glance, but the writer to the Hebrews understands clearly that this is not a lifestyle that is readily embraced by the natural man. It is totally counter-intuitive to our carnal minds. We are so accustomed to living as though our destiny in life depends entirely upon *our* efforts, skills, and natural gifts. Friends, we are on *God's* mission, and we are but the vessels through whom *He* accomplishes His work. Our capacity to be a faithful vessel is directly proportional to the extent to which we can lay down *our* efforts and rest in Him.

Entering into that rest will require diligence (labor), because it is nothing short of a radical repentance—a *metanoia*, paradigm shift—of old ways of thinking about the Kingdom of God and our role in it. We must learn, as my wife did that *if we take care of His business, He will take care of our business*. You see, "taking care of His business" is *our* part of the covenant. Laboring to enter into His rest does not mean that we play tiddly winks all day long, and expect Him to bless us with all material and spiritual blessing. Neither does it mean, on the other hand, that we feverishly attempt to alleviate all the evils in the world, believing that if we don't do something the masses of humanity are destined for unnecessary suffering; or that if we don't wear out our shoe leather passing out gospel tracts, the great bulk of the human race is destined for an eternal hell. Entering into His rest means, rather, that we come into alignment with His Kingdom purposes in all of our thoughts and actions and *then*, as Jesus said, "all these things shall be added unto you." It requires our willing labor to exercise our spirit man in place of the carnal mind and take captive to the obedience of Christ all other thoughts

that exalt itself above the knowledge of Christ within us, the hope of glory, who leads us by His Spirit. Our part of the covenant, as one faithful friend advised me, is *to pray, to listen, and then do whatever comes out of your praying and listening.*

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