

“The Wandering Church: A Chronological History of the Exodus”

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“The Wandering Church” sermon series was preached at Calvary Baptist Church in Seymour from April-November of 2016. This collection of 29 sermons covers the period immediately before and during the exodus. The focus of this series was to study the chronological history of Israel during this time. As such, detailed studies of the law, the tabernacle, and other non-historical elements were excluded. The primary texts used for these messages were Exodus and Numbers, while others books such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy were cited on occasion. “The Wandering Church” provides a fairly comprehensive historical summary of the life of Moses and the exodus era of Israel.

Though the series is titled “The Wandering Church”, let me be clear that Old Testament Israel is distinct and different from the New Testament church. Israel was a distinct nationality/ethnic group comprised primarily of the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The church is not made up of a single nation or ethnicity, but rather is comprised of all Christians who have accepted salvation through Jesus and been filled with the Holy Spirit. The reason for using the term “Church” to refer to “Israel” in the title of this series was simply to highlight the similarities between their challenges in the days of Moses and our struggles as God’s people today.

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Map of the Exodus



The Egyptian Captivity - Exodus 1

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“All these [Old Testament saints] died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.” - Hebrews 11:13-16

This morning we launch into a new series of sermons through the Old Testament's books of Exodus and Numbers. Along the way, we will examine some of the related passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. We will be talking about the period of history that details the exodus, or departure, of Israel from Egypt and their subsequent journey to the edge of the Promised Land. This is one of the most epic adventures of all time. Along the way we will study many incredible stories such as the miraculous and iconic crossing of the Red Sea. The exodus account is most cherished by the Jews because it distinguishes them among the nations of the world. It is one of the most widely known and heralded stories in the entire Bible.

We are going to call this collection of messages “The Wandering Church”. This title seeks to underscore the waywardness and repeated disobedience of the children of God during this period of time. Over the next several months we will discover a people who despite being delivered and developed by God for a great purpose, obstinately chose to be disobedient and then detoured in another direction. They wandered aimlessly in the desert for 40 years, having never accomplished what God had originally intended. Unfortunately, this can also be said of many churches today. They are content to slowly die - one member at a time - as they stroll directionless in their ministries year after year, never achieving the glorious purposes of God.

Before we embark on this amazing journey together, it is necessary to first familiarize ourselves with the history that led up to it. The exodus is the story of God's deliverance of the children of Israel from the oppressive rule of Pharaoh. But how did the children of Israel come to be in Egypt in the first place, and why were the Egyptians so heartlessly cruel to them? How had their living conditions deteriorated and become so desperate? This is the topic of our message today - understanding the Egyptian Captivity.

I. ISRAEL MULTIPLIES IN EGYPT - Exodus 1:1-7

The history of the Jews as a unique people begins with the patriarch Abraham. Originally named Abram, this faithful man was called out of his homeland in Ur and told to move to a land that God would show him. The place where Abraham eventually settled was called Canaan, and there God promised to make him the father of a great nation. Abraham bore two sons - Ishmael and Isaac. While God loved them both, His promise would be fulfilled through Isaac. The chosen son Isaac also had two sons - Esau and

Jacob. This time God chose Jacob, and renamed him Israel. Jacob had 12 sons, and each of them had numerous descendants. Collectively this group of people are known as the children of Israel.

One of Jacob's sons was named Joseph. His story, which is told in the last several chapters of Genesis, is quite remarkable. Through a providential series of events, Joseph was sold into slavery, carried away to Egypt, and eventually rose in power to become second only to Pharaoh in leadership over the nation. When a severe famine struck the area, Joseph's preparation ensured that Egypt would have the necessary food to survive. Hearing this, Jacob and his other 11 sons left Canaan and relocated to a region in Egypt called Goshen where they could wait out the famine. Welcomed by their estranged brother Joseph, Jacob and his family stayed in Egypt indefinitely choosing not to return to Canaan even after the famine ended.

In the opening verses of the book of Exodus, we read that there were originally 70 members of Jacob's family who moved to Egypt. All 12 of his sons, along with their families and servants, moved there. As time went by all of that generation passed away, but the sons of Israel were fruitful and continued to multiply. As they did, their presence as foreign immigrants became increasingly noticeable to the native Egyptians. Many were beginning to become leery of and uncomfortable with these aliens who were living among them.

II. ISRAEL MISTREATED IN EGYPT - Exodus 1:8-14

While Joseph had been widely respected by Pharaoh and the Egyptians at large during his lifetime, as the years passed the memory of his leadership and noble character faded. A new Pharaoh took the throne who did not hold Joseph in high regard like his predecessors had for so long. He doubted the sincerity of Joseph's relatives, the children of Israel, who had settled in the land. Fear led this Pharaoh to question the allegiance of these foreigners, and suspect that they might rebel or ally with Egypt's enemies.

In order to address this growing concern, the Pharaoh began to oppress the children of Israel. He appointed taskmasters over them and forced them into hard labor. The descendants of Jacob were enslaved to the Egyptians, and were used to build storage cities and to do all sorts of public works. However, despite the Pharaoh's efforts to squelch the perceived threat, Israel continued to multiply and grow in number. Frustrated, the Pharaoh increased the amount and difficulty of the labor, forcing the descendants of Jacob to make bricks and mortar, to work in the fields, and to do all sorts of rigorous tasks. Life for Israel had become painful and bitter.

This same type of skepticism exists today. One of the hottest political issues in America is how to deal with the foreigners who are living in this country. There is a great deal of anxiety about the possible danger that some of these people might pose to our society. Much of this is fueled by hateful speech and broad generalities about certain people groups. Whether this fear is justified or not, it certainly is present and functions to shape our public policy. While we may not agree with the Egyptian's treatment of Israel, our present circumstances make it easy to understand why they were concerned about having

a large presence of foreigners living among them.

III. ISRAEL MURDERED IN EGYPT - Exodus 1:15-22

Pharaoh soon realized that his attempts to eliminate the foreign threat were not being successful. As such he determined to step-up his actions against the children of Israel. He instructed the Hebrew midwives to kill any and all boys that were born from among the sons of Jacob. These women were like nurses who assisted in the delivery of new babies, and would have been able to immediately murder or abort any sons that were born. This decree went out to all of the midwives who aided Hebrew women when they gave birth. By eliminating all of the sons, Pharaoh hoped to prevent the population of Israel from increasing further and to force the remaining women to assimilate into the culture through marriage to Egyptian men.

Fortunately, the midwives feared God and did not do as the Pharaoh had commanded. When he realized their insubordination, Pharaoh asked them why they were not killing the boys as they had been instructed. The midwives responded that the Hebrew women were vigorous and giving birth without their assistance or before they could arrive to help. Furious that his plan had been foiled yet again, Pharaoh elevated his tactics once more. This time he commanded that every son who was born to Israel be cast in the Nile River, where obviously it would drown. Pharaoh was doggedly determined to eliminate the foreign threat.

This is the first recorded instance in Scripture in which a nation sought to completely destroy the Jewish people - but it would not be the last. Though they had not yet become an official nation, had Pharaoh's measures worked Israel would have never survived. Attempts to eradicate the Jews have continued throughout history, but all to no avail. God's promise to preserve Israel has withstood every human effort to eliminate them. Pharaoh thought that he could simply erase God's people from the pages of history, but he was - like so many others who have thought the same thing - dead wrong.

CONCLUSION

The first chapter of Exodus covers a period of just over 300 years spanning from the death of Joseph to the birth of Moses. This one chapter represents more time than the rest of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy combined. Over the course of these 3 centuries, the quality of life for the children of Israel slowly deteriorated from one of peace and prosperity to one of turmoil and hardship. This decline did not occur overnight, but gradually over several generations. Things got progressively worse for God's people as the days went by. Surely we can see how this parallels the increasing hostility toward Christians today.

One of the recurring themes found in the Bible is that of strangers and pilgrims. God's people are often described as those who are living in a foreign land. In many cases they are not welcomed. Our residence may be here on this earth, but our citizenship is in heaven. We are simply sojourners here, aspiring to contribute and make a positive difference, yet ultimately destined for our heavenly home. And though

the world might hate us and try to oppress and persecute us, still by God's divine protection we persist and multiply even in the face of much adversity. As His redeemed children, we have hope and confidence in the fact that God has prepared for us an even greater country - a glorious Promised Land - where we will spend eternity with Him.

Next week we will introduce one of the greatest characters in the entire Word of God - a man named Moses. As the atrocities against the Hebrews continue to increase, a baby is born into a chaotic world who will grow up to become the leader and deliverer of His people. You do not want to miss this exciting, upcoming message. But as we conclude today, might I ask if you are still living as a slave to sin? Are you still living under the cruel dominion of Satan and his demonic forces? Don't you know that he wants to destroy you? Wouldn't you like to be set free from his clutches though the powerful name of Jesus Christ?

The Early Life of Moses - Exodus 2

Originally Preached on 4/24/2016

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." - Ephesians 2:10

Last Sunday we began a new series of sermons called "The Wandering Church". In this series we will present a chronological history of the exodus of Israel from Egypt to the edge of the Promised Land. We learned last week that the exodus was preceded by a period of around 400 years in which the family of Jacob moved to, settled in, and then multiplied greatly in Egypt. Their prosperity led to fear on the part of the native Egyptians, which eventually resulted in the enslavement and heavy oppression of the children of Israel.

Some 320 years after their relocation from Canaan to Egypt, sometime around 1525 BC, a child named Moses was born. As the son of Hebrew parents, and in accordance with the law of Pharaoh at the time of his birth, Moses was supposed to be cast alive into the Nile River. This gruesome tactic was intended to curb the foreign population. In a strange sort of way, this is exactly what happened...

Moses' life can be broken up neatly into 3 sections, each lasting around 40 years. In part one, Moses lived in the household of Pharaoh; in part two, he lived in desert of Midian; in part three, he led the exodus. Moses would live two-thirds of his life watching the oppression and persecution of the Jewish people. In his later years God would use him to be their deliverer.

This morning we will examine the events of Exodus chapter 2 which cover the first 80 years of Moses' life from his birth to his calling at the burning bush. We will discover the remarkable circumstances which led to his upbringing as Egyptian royalty, his violent outburst that resulted in a murder, and his subsequent flight to and life in the arid region of Midian.

I. BABY IN A BASKET - Exodus 2:1-10

Moses' was a descendent of the tribe of Levi. After his birth, his mother could not bear the thought of casting him into the Nile River, so she hid him for 3 full months hoping to prevent the child from being discovered and killed. Can you imagine how difficult this must have been? Soon she realized that her plan could not continue - the growing infant would be found eventually. Even if he wasn't, how could this baby realistically live his entire life in hiding?

Moses' mother devised a new plan. She prepared a floating basket and placed Moses inside. Then she set the basket in the shallow water along the bank of the Nile River. She placed it among the reeds that grew there so that it would not be carried downstream by the current. She even picked an area where she knew he'd be discovered - though could not of known what might happen to him. Her plan was risky - but she had little alternative. I am sure she prayed extensively about it. Finally, she had Moses' older

sister stand at a distance watching to see what would happen to the baby in the basket.

It wasn't long until Pharaoh's daughter, along with her maidens, came down to the river to bath. She noticed the basket and had it brought up out of the water to her. When she opened it, there was baby Moses crying. Moved with pity for the Hebrew infant, the Pharaoh's daughter mercifully decided to bring up the child as her own. As this was taking place, Moses' sister approached (although they did not know her true identity) and asked if she might go and enlist a Hebrew woman to serve as the baby's nurse. When the Pharaoh's daughter agreed, the girl went and found their mother to do the job.

Moses' actual mother - though this was likely unknown by Pharaoh - was actually paid to bring up her own son. Generally nurses were responsible for the upbringing of children until about age 12. Thus, as a young child Moses was taught the heritage and faith of the Hebrews by his real mom. As a teen he began his preparation as an Egyptian prince and his mother disappears from the story, but because of her Moses would never forget his Hebrew roots...

II. ACTING OUT IN ANGER - Exodus 2:11-14

Living in the palace, it is hard to know how aware Moses was of the harsh treatment of his native people. Surely he knew it from an intellectual standpoint, but I would imagine he rarely actually saw it himself. Still, the thought of their enslavement bothered Moses until one day he went out to see it firsthand. Sure enough, he came upon an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave. Furious, Moses snapped and acted out violently. Thinking that no one would find out, and seeing no witnesses around, Moses came to his Hebrew brother's defense and murdered the Egyptian man. Then he buried the body before returning to the palace.

Moses went out again the next day - perhaps to see if the corpse had been discovered, or maybe to see if someone else needed protecting. While he was walking, he found two Hebrews fighting each other. When he intervened, they told him that they knew what Moses had done the day before. Moses realized that his secret was out, and that he would soon be discovered and punished for the murder he'd committed. Moses was absolutely terrified of what might happen to him.

One of the character traits that we see throughout the life of Moses is a tendency to act out angrily. Moses had a quick temper which, though he tried hard to control it, sometimes got the better of him. As we go through this study of the exodus together, I challenge you to look for instances in which Moses became agitated and did something that he shouldn't of. He was not a perfect man, yet neither or we. God can still use us, despite our weaknesses.

III. MOVING TO MIDIAN - Exodus 2:15-22

Sure enough, when it came to Pharaoh's attention that Moses had committed such a horrendous crime, he sought to kill him. Hearing this, Moses became a fugitive running from justice. He fled to the distant desert region of Midian where he could hide safely and live in obscurity for the remainder of his life. He

settled himself there.

The daughters of the priest of Midian would come to the well to water their father's flock. One day Moses was there when they came, and he assisted them by preventing the shepherds from driving them away. When the priest found out how helpful Moses had been to his daughters, he invited him to come live with them. He even gave his daughter Zipporah in marriage to Moses. Together the couple had a son named Gershom. Moses lived in anonymity working for his father-in-law for 40 years.

The Midianites were a nomadic people who roamed about throughout the Middle East. They were originally the descendants of one of Abraham's concubines named Keturah. They are mentioned numerous times in the Old Testament, almost always warring against or causing problems for the children of Israel. While the borders of Midian are unclear, many scholars place the region along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba in northern Saudi Arabia.

IV. NOTICING THE NEED - Exodus 2:23-25

While Moses was living in Midian, persecution against his fellow Hebrews continued. Eventually the king of Egypt died and a new one took his place. Having grown up in the palace himself, it is likely that Moses had been closely acquainted with the new Pharaoh during his childhood - the two may well have been half-brothers! Despite the change in Egyptian leadership, the oppression of Israel continued and the slaves began to cry out to God for help.

Scripture says that God heard their cries and remembered His covenant with Abraham. Over 500 years earlier the LORD had promised to make a great nation of the descendants of Abraham, and to give them the land of Canaan as an inheritance. Though their present circumstances seemed desperately bleak, God was preparing to honor His word. The exodus of Israel was drawing near...

God hears His children when they cry out to Him. Although we may not always receive an answer immediately, we can trust that He is listening. When we are struggling and in need, God notices. Furthermore, He always keeps His promises. We can find great comfort in knowing that the LORD is always aware of our difficult circumstances and is making preparations to deliver us from them. He is a good God, even when our life seems bad.

CONCLUSION

Joseph began as a young Hebrew shepherd who grew up to become a mighty Egyptian monarch. Moses began as a young Egyptian monarch who grew up to become a mere Hebrew shepherd. In this sense, their lives are the exact opposite of one another and serve as fitting bookends to the 400 years of Israel's presence in Egypt. Moses' life seeks to unwind Joseph's life. God had used Joseph to bring His people to Egypt, and would now use Moses to lead them out...

As I consider the story of Moses, I realize that it does not matter how far you've fallen - God can still lift

you back up. It doesn't matter how big the mistakes of your past may be - God can still forgive you. It doesn't matter how far you've run away from Him - God still welcomes you home. It doesn't even matter how old you are - God can still use you.

God used the circumstances of Moses' early life to prepare him for what was coming next... While in the palace, Moses learned how to be an expert administrator and a bold, fearless leader. While in the desert, Moses learned to be a patient and compassionate shepherd. Moses was familiar with the inner workings of the Egyptian government and the practices of Pharaoh's house, and he also knew and held a strong faith in the God of Israel. Together these skills made him uniquely qualified to lead the exodus.

I take great comfort in knowing that God does not thrust His children into service without preparing them in advance for it. He does not expect us to do things without equipping us to do them. In our message today, God spent the first 80 years of Moses' life readying him for the last 40. Could it be that God is preparing you right now for something wonderful yet to come?

The Calling of Moses - Exodus 3-4

Originally Preached on 5/1/2016

“Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”
- 2 Corinthians 3:4-6

We are just beginning a new study through the historical Old Testament account of the exodus. This collection of messages is called “The Wandering Church” and it is intended to help us make connections between the journey of God’s children from Egypt to Canaan and our own journey as the Christian church. There are many lessons that we can learn from the events of the exodus that can be applied to our lives today.

When we concluded our sermon last week, there were two distinct storylines playing out. The children of Israel were crying out to God for help as they labored tirelessly while enslaved in Egypt. Meanwhile, a fugitive named Moses was living in obscure exile over 300 miles away shepherding his father-in-law’s flocks in the Arabian wastelands of Midian. But, in accordance with the divine plan of God, these two stories were about to intersect.

In today’s message, the third in this new series, we are going to examine the calling of God upon Moses’ life. We will read about God’s appearance to him, and how Moses initially responds to it. We will discover a man who openly questioned God’s plan for his life and a God who had an answer for his every objection.

I. THE BURNING BUSH - Exodus 3:1-10

It started out as just another ordinary day. Moses was shepherding the flocks, leading them west through the wilderness of Midian to the foot of Mount Horeb. Suddenly in the distance he saw a bush that was on fire yet it was not being consumed. Fascinated, he approached and as he drew near the LORD spoke to him from the midst of the burning bush. Moses took off his sandals, for he was standing on holy ground, and hid his face in fear as not to look upon God.

The LORD told Moses that He had heard the cries of His people and had come down to deliver them from their Egyptian bondage. He then directed Moses to leave his home in Midian, to return to the homeland, to confront Pharaoh, and to lead Israel out of Egypt. God planned to use Moses as the instrument through which He would set His people free.

There is no indication that God had spoken previously to Moses about this. Nor is there any sign that Moses was contemplating a return to Egypt. On the contrary, he seemed quite comfortable living a quiet life hidden away in Midian. This is often how it is when God calls us. While He may have been preparing

us behind the scenes for decades, when His call comes it seems sudden and catches us by surprise. We are challenged to leave a life of familiarity and comfort in order to follow Him into the unknown.

The burning bush is quite astonishing. It can symbolize someone who is “on fire” for God. There have been seasons in my life when I would describe myself in this way. This is probably true for most believers. While intense for a while, invariably, my fire begins to fade and flicker away. But in the case of this miracle, the blazing bush was not consumed and the fire did not burn out. May we as Christians pray that our fire for God is not extinguished by this worries of this world, and that we will always burn brightly for all to see.

II. EXCUSES, EXCUSES - Exodus 3:11-4:17

I can only imagine what Moses must have been feeling when God asked him to lead Israel out of their captivity. This was to be a monumental task which would involve confronting Pharaoh himself and the great might of the Egyptian people. Such a thought would have given anyone pause. Is it any surprise that Moses responded by offering several excuses for why he could not obey the LORD's call?

Moses' first excuse was to question his own credentials. “Who am I to lead the people out of captivity?” he asked. “I am a nobody - a lowly shepherd. Surely there is someone else much more qualified than I am to do this task.” But God replied, “I will be with you. While you might be a nobody in your own strength, with Me by your side you are a somebody!”

Moses's second excuse was to wonder what he'd say. “Who shall I say has sent me?” he questioned. “By what authority will I speak?” This time the LORD answered, “I AM WHO I AM. Tell the elders of Israel that I AM sent you.” God then proceeded to give Moses further instructions regarding what he was to say and do.

Moses then offered a third excuse. “After I tell them that You sent me and share this wonderful message of deliverance, what if they don't believe me?” God responds by giving Moses the power to perform three miraculous signs as evidence that he is being truthful. The first sign is the ability to turn his staff into a serpent. The second is the ability to make his hand leprous and then clean again. The third is the ability to turn water from the Nile into blood by pouring it on the ground.

Despite these miraculous proofs, Moses continues with a fourth excuse. “But LORD, I am a poor speaker. I will be unable to convince the people to follow me.” Perhaps you are terrified of public speaking too. Now God reminds Moses that He created the mouth of man, and that He will give Moses the necessary skill to deliver His message convincingly.

Finally Moses says plainly, “LORD, please send someone else.” But thankfully God refuses to let Moses completely off the hook. Though furious at Him, God makes an accommodation for Moses by allowing his brother Aaron to speak on his behalf. Thus, it will be both Moses and Aaron who will carry the message of God's coming deliverance to the children of Israel.

III. BACK TO EGYPT - Exodus 4:18-31

Having run out of excuses, Moses reluctantly accepted God's call. He told his father-in-law Jethro that he was returning to Egypt to check on the well-being of his Hebrew brethren. Then he gathered his belongings, along with his wife and children, and set off with his trusty staff in hand. As he went, the LORD spoke to Moses, warning him about Pharaoh. God referred to the children of Israel collectively as His firstborn son, and stated that in return for Pharaoh's murderous treatment of them and his refusal to let them go He would have to kill the Pharaoh's firstborn son. This statement foreshadows the Passover.

Different Bible scholars interpret this next episode differently. Some dispute over who exactly God intended to "kill". In light of the previous verses, I believe it occurred as follows. As his family was lodging one night on their journey back to Egypt, God sought to "kill" Moses' firstborn son Gershom. I suspect that LORD was using this as a test or a lesson, such as in the case of Abraham and Isaac. Acting quickly, Moses' wife Zipporah circumcised the boy and the LORD immediately relented. Though the child had been spared, Zipporah was extremely upset. I am sure Moses was quite shaken up as well. I believe that following this incident, Moses decided to send his family back home to Midian and continued on his journey alone.

At this point God speaks to Moses' brother Aaron and instructs him to go and join Moses. When the two meet at the mountain of God, Moses tells Aaron everything that God had said to him. Together they return to Egypt and assemble the leaders of Israel. Aaron proclaims the message of God and Moses performs the miraculous signs as supporting evidence. Upon hearing and seeing this the Hebrews are convinced that God has indeed heard their cries, and they begin to worship joyfully because they believe that their deliverance is near.

CONCLUSION

As we draw this morning's message to a close, Moses has left his family in Midian and returned to Egypt along with his brother Aaron. Together the brothers have made contact with the elders of Israel and have shared God's plan to deliver them from captivity. By this point the proverbial wheels of the exodus have been set into motion - there is no going back.

Moses was, at least at first, somewhat hesitant to obey God's calling for his life. He put up strong resistance by making several excuses. He even refused to go without assistance from another person - in this case, his brother Aaron. Moses was slow to act and vocally skeptical of God's plan. To be honest, I find Moses' reluctance to be... refreshing. The truth is, everyone who has ever been called of God to leave behind their old life in exchange for a new one has doubts. Whether these are ever expressed or not, it is human nature to question the calling of God. We should take much comfort in knowing that Moses had doubts, just as we all do from time to time. And it's okay!

Still, Moses went. He obeyed. And therein lies an important lesson for us all. Even when we don't believe in ourselves, we can still believe in God. Even when we doubt our own abilities, we can be confident in God's ability. Even when we have questions about God's plan, we can trust that He knows the answers. Even when we think that we can't do it, we can be certain that our God can. It is when our fears succumb to our faith that anything is possible.

I believe that God is challenging us today to stop making excuses. None of them are justified. Simply put, there is absolutely no acceptable reason to say no to Him. The only appropriate response is obedience. Maybe you have questions, maybe you have doubts... don't we all? I know that I do. Regardless of them, we must follow our Lord wherever He leads us.

A Rocky Start - Exodus 5-6

Originally Preached on 5/8/2016

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” - Galatians 6:9

We recently began an extended Bible study called “The Wandering Church”. We are diving deep into the exodus of Israel and considering its application and relevance to the church today. As I have considered the entirety of the content that we will cover over the course of the next few months, I have discovered that it breaks neatly into 4 major sections. The first of these, which is where we are right now, is about the “deliverance” of God’s people.

This morning we pick up their story of deliverance in Exodus chapter 5. We have already discussed how the children of Israel came to be in Egypt, how they became enslaved there for many years, the birth and preparation of Moses, and how God finally called him to bring the Hebrews out from their bondage. At the conclusion of our previous message, Moses had left his family and Midian and joined up with his brother Aaron. The two of them had returned to Egypt and met with the elders of Israel. They had shared God’s message of deliverance with their brethren and everyone rejoiced greatly.

Now it was time for the hard part - to actually confront Pharaoh and demand that he let the people go. You see, it is one thing to talk about what God’s plans are among other believers, but another entirely to actually put them into practice in the world. Anyone can talk about the will of God for their lives and/or for their church, but how many of us have the courage to actually do it? Moses and Aaron were called to risk their lives by going before the king and commanding him to do something that he didn’t want to do.

In today’s sermon we are going to look at a common experience that many of us share with Moses. He had made the decision, despite great personal sacrifice, to obey and follow the direction of God for his life. But as he began to live it out, he immediately ran into several huge obstacles which blocked his pathway. It was a rocky start to say the least. Would these difficulties cause him to give up on God’s calling, or would he persevere?

I. DENIED - Exodus 5:1-5

Moses and Aaron requested to speak with the Pharaoh, and he agreed - perhaps because he remembered Moses from years ago. When they met, Moses and Aaron told the Pharaoh that God had instructed him to let the children of Israel go to celebrate a feast in the wilderness. Pharaoh asked, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?” He did not respect or revere the God of Israel, and saw himself as a god more powerful than any other. His answer: “I will not let the people go.”

I would imagine that Moses and Aaron were expecting a different answer. After all, hadn’t God sent them to deliver his people? So, they asked again. “Please Pharaoh... will you let the people go?” Can you

hear the desperation in their voice? It is almost like they were begging him to oblige. It makes me wonder - why do we as Christians seek the world's permission to do God's will? Why do we want their approval so badly, when the LORD has already told us what He'd have us to do?

Pharaoh, probably angry that he has to repeat himself, again tells them no. He indicates that the labor of the Hebrew slaves is vital to his nation's economy and well-being and that he will not allow them to stop working, even temporarily, to worship their (in his eyes) weak and pathetic god. And with that Moses and Aaron's audience with the Pharaoh abruptly ends and they are escorted out of the palace no doubt stunned and dismayed by what has transpired.

II. DISTRESSED - Exodus 5:6-21

As if this wasn't bad enough, things were about to get even worse. Pharaoh was furious with the children of Israel and ordered that their labor be increased even more. He instructed their taskmasters to no longer provide them with the straw necessary to make bricks, but did not reduce the quota of bricks that they were to produce each day. As such, the slaves had to find and gather their own straw in addition to making the bricks.

When the task proved to be too difficult, the Hebrews were beaten mercilessly and accused of being lazy. The foremen realized that without straw they could not possibly make the daily quota. They cried out to Pharaoh, but he would not relent. The treatment of the slaves had become so awful that many began losing the hope of deliverance that they'd so recently celebrated.

As Moses and Aaron watched this happening, I am certain that they felt responsible in some way for the tragic turn of events. What if they had just kept their mouth shut and never spoken with Pharaoh? Sure things were bad back then, but at least they were better than it was now! I have found that often times when someone commits their life to serving God things get harder and more difficult - not easier. It is as if the Devil himself pulls out all the stops in an effort to prevent us from walking with the LORD.

Even the people who they had been sent to deliver blamed them for the increased burden. Israel had originally embraced these 2 strangers - Moses and Aaron - and believed in their message. But now they despised the brothers and considered them the cause of their great distress. Moses and Aaron had been rejected by both Pharaoh and the Hebrew slaves.

III. DISCOURAGED - Exodus 5:22-6:12

Rejected by everyone, Moses approaches God and asks Him why this has all happened. If the LORD knew that the harsh treatment of the Hebrews would intensify, and that the rigorous demands of the slaves would increase as a result of Moses' interaction with the Pharaoh, why would He send him in the first place? I suspect that Moses was quite upset at God for leading him into such a miserable situation - I probably would have been.

The LORD lovingly reassures Moses that He will yet deliver Israel, but not before performing several miraculous acts of judgment against Pharaoh. He had told this to Moses previously, but apparently Moses missed it. Sometimes we don't hear the parts of messages that we don't want to hear. These 10 plagues will show everyone that the God of Jacob is without question mighty and sovereign over all. Though he probably wasn't very welcomed among them, Moses again speaks to the Hebrew elders concerning God's promise. Unlike before, this time they didn't believe him.

Finally, God instructs Moses to return to Pharaoh a second time and demand that he let the people go. Like he had done before, Moses reminds the LORD that he is a poor speaker and will not be convincing. By this point it is pretty obvious by this point that Moses feels extremely deflated and defeated. Wouldn't you?

CONCLUSION

In the later parts of chapter 6, the family record of Moses and Aaron is given. Though not a part of the narrative per se, this is still an important insert into the story. We will not study these passages in this series, but I wanted to at least make mention of them rather than just skipping over them entirely. The names listed in this registry help us to better understand the ancestral origin of the Levites, the descendants of Levi.

In regard to Moses, he has left his home and family in Midian to pursue the calling of God. He has believed that God would use him to deliver the children of Israel from the yoke of Egyptian bondage. Having walked in the presence and power of the LORD almighty, he has expected success in his endeavors. He has convinced a whole nation of people to trust him to be their deliverer. He has, in short, put everything on the line. And, at least so far, it has been a complete disaster.

Perhaps there is someone here today that can relate to this message. Maybe your commitment to Christ came with a great personal cost, but you were willing to make that sacrifice because you expected God to do something spectacular. But as you listen to my voice today there is only bitterness and disappointment in your life because you feel that God has not come through on His promises. Perhaps you too feel denied, distressed, and discouraged...

I want to challenge you today to not give up on God's plan for your life. Press on. Keep going. Maybe things have not turned out exactly like you expected them to, but that doesn't mean that you failed or that God somehow misled you. You have been called for a purpose, but you will have to persevere through many trials and tribulations in order to accomplish it. The road will not be an easy one, but you must remain steadfast in your commitment to Christ. God will keep His word... it's just a matter of time.

Judgment Upon the Nation - Exodus 7-10

Originally Preached on 5/15/2016

“For the nation and the kingdom which will not serve you will perish, and the nations will be utterly ruined.” - Isaiah 60:12

In the previous message we read that Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh and asked him to let God's people go. The king denied their request and instead increased the labor of the Hebrew slaves. He withheld their straw, but still required the same production of bricks. As such, the children of Israel despised Moses and Aaron for aggravating their already stressful position. They had made a bad situation even worse. Still, the LORD continued to promise Moses that He would compel Pharaoh into letting Israel go.

As we continue our sermon series this morning, we find that Moses and Aaron have returned a second time to speak with Pharaoh. In the first 13 verses of chapter 7, we read that the brothers have come again to demand that the king allow the children of God to go and worship Him. This time Aaron throws down his staff before the king and it becomes a snake. When the Egyptian magicians are able to do the same thing, Aaron's snake devours all of their snakes. Despite this wonderful sign, Pharaoh still refuses to let the people go.

Moses had already been forewarned that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened and that God would enact several severe judgments upon the nation as punishment for their treatment of His people. Because of Pharaoh's stubbornness, the 10 plagues of Egypt begin. In this morning's message we will briefly examine the first 9 of these horrifying catastrophes.

I. BLOOD - Exodus 7:14-25

One morning Moses and Aaron meet Pharaoh on the bank of the Nile River again demanding that he let the people go. In a show of His great power, God used Moses and Aaron to turn the Nile and much of the other waters in Egypt into blood. Accordingly, the fish in the river died and there was little available to drink. However when the king's magicians were able to perform a similar feat, Pharaoh was convinced that this was some sort of trick. Therefore, he arrogantly refused to let the children of Israel go.

II. FROGS - Exodus 8:1-15

The brothers again came to Pharaoh with their demand. When Pharaoh refused, God sent swarms of frogs that spread all over the land of Egypt. They were everywhere - in people's homes, ovens, bowls, and even beds. The Egyptians magicians were able to mimic this plague to some degree, but the conditions were so severe that Pharaoh initially agreed to allow Israel to go worship. Believing that they had finally achieved success, Moses prayed and all the frogs died. They were gathered into large,

stinking piles. When Pharaoh saw that the plight had passed, he changed his mind and would not release the people as he'd promised.

III. GNATS/LICE - Exodus 8:16-19

Scripture is silent as to whether or not Moses and Aaron actually went to see Pharaoh before inflicting the third plague upon the land. God sent multitudes of gnats (some interpreters say lice) which infested both man and beast. For the first time, the magicians were unable to copy this miracle at all and they acknowledged that it must be the work of God. But Pharaoh himself remained unconvinced and still refused to let the Hebrew children go.

IV. FLIES/INSECTS - Exodus 8:20-32

Again Moses and Aaron go and meet Pharaoh at the Nile River. This time the LORD sends swarms of flies that cover and lay waste to the land of Egypt. However, none are present in the area of Goshen where God's children live. As such, there is a clear distinction made between the Egyptians and the Hebrews. Seeing the widespread devastation, Pharaoh agrees to allow Israel to go worship somewhere in the land of Egypt or places nearby. But when the plague ends, he again changes his mind.

V. LIVESTOCK - Exodus 9:1-7

The brothers come again before Pharaoh with the same message. They warn him that if he will not release the slaves, God will strike the livestock of the Egyptians. Sure enough, the next day God unleashes pestilence upon the animals of the field - cattle, horses, camels, sheep, and so on. Thousands of them die, of all different breeds. Yet among the livestock of Israel not a single animal is killed. Again God makes a distinction between His people and the Egyptians. Still, Pharaoh remains obstinate.

VI. BOILS - Exodus 9:8-17

Moses and Aaron appear before the king and throw soot from a kiln into the sky. As it scatters and blows away, boils break out upon Pharaoh, the Egyptians, and their remaining animals. So hideous and painful are the sores that the magicians are unable to stand. However, Pharaoh will not listen. Moses tells him that the only reason that God has not completely destroyed Egypt already is because He is declaring His power throughout the earth.

VII. HAIL - Exodus 9:18-35

Moses warns Pharaoh that God intends to send a hail storm that will be worse than any other before it. He tells him to bring everything out of the field and into shelter. Stubbornly, the king refuses to believe him. The next day the severe storm comes, striking the outdoor laborers and remaining livestock, and utterly destroying the trees and agricultural crops. Seeing the devastation, Pharaoh agrees to let the Hebrews go on the condition that the hail storm ceases. But when it does, once again he changes his

mind and refuses to let Israel go.

VIII. LOCUSTS - Exodus 10:1-20

As they had done numerous times before, Moses and Aaron come again before Pharaoh telling him that if he will not consent to their demand God will send swarms of locusts upon Egypt. Terrified, the Pharaoh's own servants beg him to release Israel in order to prevent this coming catastrophe. He agrees to let only the men go - not the women and children. This arrangement is not acceptable, and so the next day an east wind brings locusts which cover the land devouring what little remains of the plants, fruit, and grain. Pharaoh quickly calls for Moses and promises to let all the people go. But when a west wind carries all the locusts away, he has a change of heart... again.

IX. DARKNESS - Exodus 10:21-29

The Bible is unclear as to whether Moses goes to Pharaoh before the ninth plague occurs. Nevertheless, Moses stretches his hands to the sky and darkness falls over the land of Egypt for 3 full days. So thick is the darkness that the Egyptians could not see one another and were forced to stay in their houses - yet the children of Israel had light. Pharaoh summons Moses and tells him that the Hebrews can go and worship God, but they may not take their animals with them. Again the terms are unacceptable, and Moses refuses to abide by them.

CONCLUSION

There are several lessons that we can learn from these tragedies that befell Egypt.

At first Pharaoh outright refused to submit to God's will. When pressure began to mount he would consent until he got what he wanted and then not follow through on his promises. As the plagues became even more intense, he tried negotiating the terms of God's command. "If you will stay in Egypt...", "If you will worship nearby...", "If you take the men only...", and "If you leave the livestock...", he said, "then I will let you go." But in every instance, the force of God's will was stronger than Pharaoh's rebuttal. We must learn that the commands of God are not up for debate, and we are fools if we think we can disobey them or modify them without suffering the consequences.

The magicians were able to duplicate or "explain away" the first few plagues. As such, they sought to deny the existence of God. As the judgments became worse, however, they were unable to mimic them. Eventually these men were forced to concede that the miracles must be acts of God, yet they still remained defiant. Finally, after much suffering, they recognized their futility before God and began begging Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go. It had taken some time, but the plagues actually led these servants to the realization that the LORD is the Almighty God, supreme and sovereign over all creation. If necessary, God will use judgment as a means to make Himself known whether in an individual's life or throughout the entire earth.

The pride and arrogance of Pharaoh is astounding. His unwillingness to consent to the demands of God led to the destruction of his entire nation. Though he was given numerous opportunities to humble himself before God, Pharaoh's heart became harder and his attitude more haughty with each new tragedy. Even as Egypt was collapsing around him, Pharaoh's stubbornness prevented him from repenting of his sin and submitting to God. Truly pride comes before a fall...

The plagues that were unleashed upon Egypt were the direct result of their mistreatment of God's people and their blatant disregard for His commands. As Americans today, we have invited the judgment of God upon our country through our own similar behavior. We need to fervently pray for the leaders and people of the United States - that they would acknowledge the reality and authority of the LORD and respect those who follow Him.

The Passover - Exodus 11 & 12

Originally Preached on 5/22/2016

“Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” - 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

The children of Israel had suffered in bondage to the Egyptians for centuries. But then a man named Moses, along with his brother Aaron, arrived with a message of deliverance. Empowered and emboldened by God, these two appeared before Pharaoh demanding that he let God’s people go. When Pharaoh repeatedly refused, God sent horrific plagues to declare His name and to judge the Egyptians. These included the water turning to blood, the infestation of frogs, multitudes of gnats, swarms of flies, the death of livestock, the breakout of boils, a devastating hailstorm, an invasion of locusts, and days of complete darkness. Yet in every instance Pharaoh remained hard-hearted, unwilling to submit to Moses’ demands.

The tenth plague would prove to be the breaking point. The misery that befell Pharaoh and all of Egypt as a result of this final judgment would prove too great for even the stubborn king to bear. So what was this last plague - the straw that broke the camel’s back? It was the death of the firstborn - an event we commonly refer to as the Passover.

In today’s message, the sixth in our series called “The Wandering Church”, we are going to take a closer look at the Passover. Not only will we learn about what happened in the days of Moses, but we will also see how the Passover has been remembered throughout the centuries, and discuss the meaning of this event and its centrality to the Christian faith.

I. THE STORY OF THE PASSOVER - Exodus 11:1-10; 12:21-23,29-32

By this point, all of the people in Egypt - except Pharaoh of course - feared the God of Israel and his children. As such, they desperately wanted them to go and willingly gave them their precious jewels and fine metals in hopes that they would finally leave. In this way, the Hebrews plundered the Egyptians just as God had foretold that they would.

Moses then announced one final plague. He warned Pharaoh that if he would not release the people then at midnight the LORD would go throughout the nation of Egypt and strike every one of their firstborn sons - of both man and beast. All of them would die, yet the firstborn sons of Israel would be spared. Inexplicably Pharaoh again refused to listen and Moses stormed out of his presence “hot with anger.”

Moses then summoned the elders of Israel and instructed each of them to select and slaughter a lamb. They were to take a bunch of hyssop branches and dip them in the lamb's blood, and then brush the blood on the top and sides of the outer doorframe of their houses. They were to then go and remain inside, along with their families, throughout the entire night. The LORD would move over the entire land of Egypt, passing over all of the homes where the blood was present, but bringing death everywhere else. Only the houses marked with blood would be spared.

That night the LORD moved and all of the firstborn sons of Egypt died. There was great wailing and agony in every Egyptian home. Devastated, Pharaoh called for Moses though it was the middle of the night and urged him and the Hebrews to leave their country immediately. In response Moses and the children of Israel hurriedly gathered their supplies that very night and set out on their journey. The exodus had begun.

II. THE CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER - Exodus 12:1-11,14-20

The LORD instructed Moses to celebrate the Passover annually in recognition of the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian captivity. The Jewish calendar revolves around Passover, intentionally placing it in the first month of the year. According to this passage, on the tenth day of this month the men of Israel are to select a lamb for their families. Then on the fourteenth at twilight they are to slaughter lamb and rub its blood upon their doorposts. The Passover lamb, as it is called, is to be without any defect or blemish.

In addition to this, each family is to observe the Passover meal. They are to roast the slaughtered lamb over fire, and eat it along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. These elements are to be prepared quickly. Those celebrating the Passover are to be dressed as if they are about to depart on a trip, and are to eat the meal as if they are in a hurry to leave. Everything is to be consumed, and if any food remains it is to be burned the next morning.

From the evening of the fourteenth day through the twenty-first day of the month the children of Israel were commanded to observe the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This week-long event began immediately following the Passover, and began and ended with a sacred assembly. No work was to be done on these days except for preparing food, and all bread was to be unleavened or made without yeast. The Days of Unleavened Bread are connected directly with the Passover and memorialize the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

The celebration of the Passover has continued on and off throughout history all the way up to the present day. Some of the most notable Passover meals mentioned in Scripture took place at Mt. Sinai led by Moses, in Gilgal led by Joshua, in Jerusalem led by King Josiah, again in Jerusalem led by King Hezekiah, during the Babylonian exile led by the Levites, and of course in the Upper Room led by Jesus Christ. The Passover memorial is central to the Jewish faith.

III. THE MEANING OF THE PASSOVER - Exodus 12:24-28

More than any other thing, the Passover represents deliverance from God's judgment. Those who escaped God's wrath were saved solely because they were covered by the blood of a lamb. This blood protected them from death and proved to be the means of their salvation.

In the New Testament Jesus is often compared with or referred to as the Passover Lamb. He was without sin, and therefore is rightly described as the unblemished Lamb of God. It is His blood, which was shed for us at Calvary, that covers our sins and rescues us from God's judgment. Unlike the slaughtering of a Passover sheep or goat that must be repeated each year, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is a one-time event. His blood covers mankind's sin for all of eternity.

The Christian ordinance that we call "The Lord's Supper" is closely related to the celebration of Passover. It was on such an evening, during the Passover meal, that Jesus instituted "The Lord's Supper". There in the upper room with His apostles gathered around Him, Jesus likened the bread to His body which would be broken for them and the cup to His blood which would be shed for them. In so doing, Jesus presented Himself as our Passover Lamb who would be slain in order to cover man's sin.

When we conduct "The Lord's Supper" today, we should think about our deliverance from our slavery to sin just as Israel thought of their deliverance from their slavery to Egypt. Having been saved from death, we should aspire to remove all sinfulness from our homes and lives just as they removed the yeast from their bread and homes during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. By doing these things, we continue to honor the spirit of these two ancient Jewish traditions.

CONCLUSION

It was the tenth plague - the Passover of the LORD - that finally broke Pharaoh's stubbornness and compelled him to let the children of Israel go. The king did not allow them to leisurely leave whenever they got ready, but rather drove the Hebrews out of Egypt hastily. Thus the departure of Israel was sudden and without much preparation at all.

I hope this message has given you a better understanding of the Passover and how it relates to Christianity today. The story of the Passover speaks to much more than just the events of the exodus, but also to the atoning work of our Savior Jesus Christ. He is our Passover Lamb, and it is His blood that is placed upon the doorposts of our hearts. When the day of judgment comes God will see those who are covered by it, and will pass over them...

Have you ever placed your faith in Christ? Are you covered by the blood of the Lamb?

Out of Egypt - Exodus 12, 13, & 14

Originally Preached on 5/29/2016

“O LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes; Make Your way straight before me.”
- Psalm 5:8

This morning’s message is titled “Out of Egypt”. We will study the departure of Israel from their home in Egypt and their flight to the shores of the Red Sea. This initial leg of the journey likely took from 7-10 days. Some have suggested exactly 7 days because that would correspond to the length of the Festival of Unleavened Bread which followed the Passover. We discussed these customs and their meanings in the sermon last week.

There have been many theories proposed by Bible historians and scholars as to the exact route that Moses and the children of God took during the exodus. I have examined several of these proposals closely and believe that the geographical, archaeological, and textual evidence supports a particular route. Therefore, for the sake of this series, I will present the exodus route that I believe to be the most accurate. If you dispute the locations that I give and adhere to a different theory - that’s fine with me. Ultimately, the directions and places along the exodus journey are not as important as the activity of God among the people as they traveled. Let’s not argue about the details and miss the bigger picture...

The first phase of the exodus took place in 3 stages. The people initially gathered at Sukkoth where they quickly organized themselves for the expedition ahead. From there they traveled along the desert road across the Wilderness of Egypt and camped in the region of Etham. Finally God instructed them to turn back or off the main road and led them south through the mountains to the beach at Pi Hahiroth. We will examine each of these phases of the journey briefly this morning.

I. ASSEMBLED IN SUKKOTH - Exodus 12:31-41

The night that the LORD passed over, after He had struck all of the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, the grieving Pharaoh summoned Moses to the palace. When he arrived, Pharaoh told him and the children of Israel to leave immediately as they had requested. He also asked that Moses say a blessing for him, finally acknowledging the powerful God of Israel.

The Egyptians urged Israel to leave hurriedly, for fear that another severe plague would possibly befall them. They freely gave the Hebrew slaves their silver, gold, and clothing in hopes that they would simply go. This likely had been taking place for some time before the Passover, as it doesn’t seem logical that such an event would happen all at once and during the night.

By dawn the children of God had quickly packed up what they could and set out from Rameses in the land of Goshen to Sukkoth. The Bible states that there were 600,000 men besides women and children. If you estimate an equal number of women as men and then add children for most of the couples this

number easily rises to almost 2 million people. "Many other people" went with them also, including some Egyptians who identified closely with Israel. The fact that they prepared unleavened bread without yeast speaks to the speed at which they were moving.

While Moses and a large number of Hebrews lived in Rameses, others were spread throughout the nation. They all gathered at Sukkoth, which was a military base just beyond the eastern border of Egypt on the northern edge of the Gulf of Suez. This strategic location was the launching point of many Egyptian military campaigns. It was an ideal spot to assemble and prepare for the exodus journey. The fortifications there served to keep Bedouins and other nomadic discontents from migrating into the Nile delta region. The name Sukkoth means "to block" or "stop the approach of" which is exactly what this city/fortress was designed to do.

From the time that the children of Israel migrated to Egypt during the reign of Joseph until the day that they departed under the leadership of Moses was exactly 430 years. Based upon other passages and fixed historical events, most Bible scholars date the exodus as having begun in 1446 BC. Therefore, according to this verse, the Hebrews originally came to Egypt in 1876 BC. This would place the story of Abraham, father of the Jews, around 2000 BC.

II. THE WAY OF THE WILDERNESS - Exodus 13:17-22

God had told Moses that after he came out of Egypt the people would worship Him at Mt. Sinai. This was in the land of Midian, where Moses had lived with his father-in-law for 40 years and had encountered the burning bush. Thus, the LORD did not lead the children of Israel north toward Canaan through the territory of the Philistines. Though this would have been the most direct route to take, God knew that the people were not yet ready for what He had in store. Therefore, he led them along the desert road toward the Red Sea.

This would have been a familiar route to Moses. As a young man he had murdered an Egyptian and fled from the clutches of Pharaoh. Most likely, he would have traveled along this very road across the Sinai Peninsula in order to get to Midian. Forty years later he and his brother Aaron probably used this very road to return to Egypt. Now Moses would travel this same way across the wilderness again, this time leading the entire congregation of Israel.

24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." 25 And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place." - Genesis 50:24-25

Centuries earlier Joseph had requested that his remains be buried in the promised land. When God finally returned the children of Israel to Canaan they were to carry the bones of Joseph with them from Egypt so that they could be reburied in the land of his fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus, when Moses set out on the exodus journey he remembered the petition of Joseph, and they exhumed his

remains and took them with them.

After leaving Sukkoth the Israelites traveled east across the Wilderness of Egypt, known today as the Sinai Peninsula, and camped in the region of Etham. God went before them leading the way with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This suggests that they were traveling round the clock - even some after dark - trying to put as much distance between themselves and the Egyptians as possible.

III. TURN BACK TO PI HAHIROTH - Exodus 14:1-4

Unexpectedly God told Moses to turn off the main roadway and journey southward through mountainous terrain. There is a natural gorge called the Wadi Watir that winds its way through the mountains in this area and finally opens onto a large beach at Pi Hahiroth. Travelers along this road are enclosed by mountains on both sides and can only move forward or back. I believe that the children of Israel followed this route to the Red Sea.

Going down this wilderness roadway doesn't seem very wise. This path dead ends at the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, trapping the traveler between the mountains and the sea with nowhere to go but back the way they came. Yet God purposely sent Israel along this road so that Pharaoh would believe that they were lost, confused, and enclosed in the desert. In a sense, God was baiting a trap for Pharaoh and his army.

But how would Pharaoh know where Moses and the Hebrews were? The name Migdol actually means "watchtower". It refers to an Egyptian look-out point, where military scouts kept watch over the area and reported what they saw to their superiors. There were actually many such Migdol sites scattered across Egypt and the Sinai. One such watchtower was located near the beach at Pi Hahiroth. The scouts there would have reported the exact location of Moses and the children of Jacob, thereby informing Pharaoh of their whereabouts.

Across from their encampment at Pi Hahiroth, on the other side of the Red Sea in Arabia, stood Baal Zephon. This city and/or mountain was named after the Canaanite god of the sea who supposedly lived there. It was believed that Baal Zephon protected sailors and vessels by controlling the storms and maritime weather. Once again God would demonstrate His supremacy over all other pagan gods by parting the seas at the very site where another deity was believed to hold the authority...

CONCLUSION

As I stated at the outset, the location of many of these geographical sites is still widely disputed. That said, what we know for sure is that God was leading His children. The cloud by day and fire by night provided clear direction for them to follow. As we consider how this applies to God's people today, we might wish that we had such visible indicators to follow. But I submit to you that we have an even better navigational system than they had. As we read and study the Bible it provides comprehensive direction for our lives. The map of God's Word lights our path through the darkness of night and guides our steps

during the brightness of day. We must stay in the Scripture constantly in order to keep on the right track!

Sometimes the LORD leads us in roundabout ways. The journey of our lives is never a direct route or a short road. Instead God often leads us the long way through the desert. On occasion He might even challenge us to turn in a direction that makes no sense to us at all and is completely opposite to where we intended to go. In these confusing times, we must trust His leadership and believe that His directions are always right. When we follow the LORD, we can be confident that He will bring us safely home.

We have a plaque on our wall at home that says "Life is a journey, not a destination!" I like that statement and believe that there is much truth to it. Sometimes we get so caught up in pursuing our own dreams or achieving our own goals that we forget to enjoy the wonders of life along the way. When we finally reach our destination and look back, we often have regrets about all the things that we've neglected and the choices that we've made. Perhaps we would be wise to follow the LORD down the long road, knowing that our lives can only be complete and satisfying when He leads the way.

Crossing the Red Sea - Exodus 14

Originally Preached on 6/5/2016

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” - 1 Corinthians 10:13

I hope that you have been blessed by “The Wandering Church” sermon series so far. At the conclusion of our study last week the children of Israel were camped at Pi-Hahiroth, on a large sandy beach adjacent to the Red Sea. Egyptian scouts at a nearby military watchtower had spotted them and reported their location to those back home. You see, the LORD had intentionally led Israel to this remote place in order to entice Pharaoh and his army to follow.

The message today deals with one of the most spectacular miracles contained in the entire Word of God. It is simply titled “Crossing the Red Sea”. In Exodus 14 we read the account of this astonishing event and how God rescued Moses and the Hebrew children from the cruel hand of Pharaoh. This story serves as the culmination of God’s deliverance of His people from Egypt.

As I studied this chapter and prepared to preach this week, 7 specific points came to the forefront. These will serve as the outline of our discourse today. Each of these individual points contains a keyword that begins with the letter “P”, and hopefully together they will help us to remember the details of this amazing occurrence.

I. THE EGYPTIANS PURSUE (v5-9)

The sadness and heavy grief that Pharaoh had experienced as a result of the Passover had turned into intense anger and bitterness. He realized that the children of Israel had fled and showed no intention of returning to Egypt. Furthermore, he saw that the workforce was greatly diminished without all of the Hebrew slaves present. Therefore, Pharaoh readied 600 select chariots, along with all of the other chariots, and set out in pursuit of Moses and his followers. He had received a report of their location near the sea.

Though Israel had a few days head-start, it did not take long for Pharaoh’s army to catch up seeing that they were riding horses while the children of God were on foot. Hypothetically speaking, if the children of Israel walked an average of 3 mph for 10 hours a day, in a week they would have traveled the 210 distance from Succoth to Pi-Hahiroth on the bank of the Red Sea. A swifter Egyptian army could have easily traveled 10 mph in their chariots for 7 hours a day allowing for ample time to rest their horses and still covered the same distance in only three days. Thus, Pharaoh’s army overtook Israel on the beach near Pi-Hahiroth.

II. THE HEBREWS PANIC (v10-12)

When the Hebrews saw the Egyptian chariots approaching, they were understandably terrified. Moses had led them into a vulnerable position with seemingly no escape. They were surrounded by mountains on three sides and the Red Sea on the other. Thinking that their death was all but certain, the children of Israel began to panic and to cry out, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt only to die in the wilderness? We would have been better off living as slaves!"

Though you may have never been in their exact position, perhaps you have made a similar expression - something like "Lord, I was better off before you got involved in my life!" It is always easier to live in slavery than to bear the responsibility of freedom. For this reason, many once-professing Christians revert back to their old sinful lifestyles. Living in the freedom of Jesus Christ can be extremely dangerous, difficult, and demanding. At times, slavery to sin seems more appealing than the liberty of righteousness. After all, slaves don't have to love, forgive, accept, or even care about others. But don't be deceived - it is better to die free than to live enslaved!

III. THE ANGEL PROTECTS (v19-20)

The pillar of fire and cloud that had gone ahead of Israel and led them up to this point shifted its position to behind them. In other words, it moved in between them and the closing Egyptian army. This cloud effectively created a protective barrier between the two camps, so that neither came near to the other throughout the entire night. The angel of God was present in the cloud and held the forces of Pharaoh back so that LORD's children would have plenty of time to escape.

God temporarily kept the Egyptians at bay thereby providing Israel an opportunity to act. But what if they hadn't done so? What might have happened had they remained on the beach frozen in fear? And what about us today? This is our opportunity as God's church to do what He has called us to do. This is our time to act with uncompromising and unrelenting faith. We Christians can't continue to sit idly by waiting to move...

IV. THE WATERS PART (v13-18,21)

In the midst of the chaos, Moses reassured the people that God would fight for them and deliver them from the hand of Pharaoh. Then the LORD told Moses to lift up his staff and stretch his hands out over the sea, and it would be divided. Acting with amazing faith, Moses did exactly as he'd been instructed. God sent a strong east wind which swept back the sea and turned the seafloor into dry land. The waters remained parted all night long, providing several hours for the children of Israel to cross.

V. THE CHILDREN PASS (v22)

The distance across the Red Sea from Pi-Hahiroth to Baal Zephon is approximately 8 miles. If the children of Israel crossed the sea there, as I believe they did, they could have easily made it in a single night just as the Bible says. The ground below them was dry and easy to walk upon, and the parted water stood like walls on their right and left. At the normal walking speed we discussed earlier, the entire group could have passed through the divided sea in about 3-4 hours.

Imagine for a moment what these people saw and felt as they walked through the Red Sea that night. It must have been surreal - almost dreamlike. With raging waters heaped up on both sides threatening to come crashing down at any moment, it must have been a bit scary crossing through the sea. I can envision the smells, the sounds, and the emotions that were present as they passed. What an incredible scene it must have been!

VI. THE ARMY PERISHES (v23-28)

Blocked by the angel of God in the cloud, the Egyptian army initially waited on the shore as Israel fled across the sea. But at some point during the night the cloud lifted and Pharaoh led his chariots forward into the sea as well, chasing after Moses and the people. By morning light Israel had safely reached the other side, while the Egyptians were still some distance behind in the middle of the Red Sea. God threw the army into confusion and caused their chariot wheels to swerve, which prompted them to call for retreat... but it was too late.

God told Moses to stretch his hands out over the sea again, and at daybreak he did so. The waters came crashing in from both sides and the sea returned to normal. The entire Egyptian army was swept away - drowned in the depths of the Red Sea. Bible historians and scholars still debate as to whether Pharaoh died with the rest of his army or somehow survived, but either way the children of Israel were finally free from their bondage.

VII. THE LORD PREVAILS (v29-31)

The LORD saved His people from the hand of their oppressors. It had been almost 400 years coming, but God finally kept His promise to deliver the descendants of Jacob. When the people saw what God had done and began to consider His great power, they were in awe of Him. As such, they feared and revered the LORD and showed increased respect for Moses. This helped to solidify his place as leader during the events that would follow. God had prevailed over His enemies by achieving an overwhelming victory!

CONCLUSION

Perhaps you have heard the popular saying, "If God leads you to it, He will also lead you through it." There is no greater story to demonstrate the truth of this statement than that of the Red Sea Crossing.

God led them into a seemingly impossible situation, and then made a way for them to escape. Perhaps you feel trapped by the circumstances of your life today. Maybe you are caught between a rock and a hard place - between the mountains, the army, and the sea - and your situation appears hopeless. Could it be that your desperation has led you here this morning?

We serve a God who has the power to part the seas. This means that He can and will deliver His people from the hand of the enemy. With every temptation, and in every snare, the LORD has promised to provide a way of escape. Sometimes the road to freedom is difficult and we may still have to carry the scars of our past decisions, but in Christ there is a way out. Don't stand helplessly cowering on the banks of this life any longer. Give your burdens to the Lord today and allow Him to lead you through the parted sea to a beautiful shore waiting on the other side.

Bitter Made Better - Exodus 15:22-27

Originally Preached 6/12/2016

“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.’” - John 4:13-14

After centuries spent in bondage to the Egyptians, after watching the LORD impose 10 crippling plagues upon their captors, and now after seeing Pharaoh’s army consumed by the Red Sea the children of Israel had finally been set free. Their long-awaited deliverance was cause to celebrate, and there on the beach at Baal-Zephon the Hebrews worshiped and sang praises to the Lord.

The song of Moses and the children of God is recorded in Exodus 15. His sister Miriam and the women with her also sang and danced. These poetic lyrics tell of God’s miraculous victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea and declare that people all over the world have heard and now tremble before the God of Israel. The song of Moses is the first “song” written in Scripture, and interestingly it is also the last. The apostle John describes hearing the chorus those who have overcome the beast singing a variation of this song of deliverance in Revelation 15.

Now safely out of Egyptian territory and without anyone in pursuit, Moses and his followers are finally able to relax. From this point forward the pace of the exodus slows down considerably. They are no longer in a hurry or on the run. When they are moving, the people will travel much shorter distances each day. When they do stop to camp, they will frequently stay at the same place for weeks or even months at a time.

In today’s message we will learn what happened in the days immediately following the Red Sea crossing. As the people followed Moses onward, they would encounter several different types of water. In each of these instances, God sought to develop His children’s understanding of and strengthen their faith in Him.

I. BITTER WATER (Exodus 15:22-23)

Having rested and recuperated from their all-nighter at the Red Sea, Moses rallied the people to begin moving again. He led them into the Wilderness of Shur, called elsewhere in Scripture the Wilderness of Etham, which is an arid desert region in northern Arabia. By this point in their journey Israel had been traveling for at least a week if not longer, depending upon one’s interpretation of the exodus route. They were likely running low on the water that they’d carried with them out of Egypt and therefore needed to find a place to refill and replenish their supply.

After 3 days of walking through the dry, hot wilderness the people had found no water. They were beginning to become a bit nervous. Just as their need was becoming more pronounced, the children of

God arrived at Marah. It is unclear whether there was a man-made well there, a natural spring, a flowing fountain, or some other type of source - but whatever the case there was much needed water!

But soon Israel's excitement turned to disappointment. When they tasted the water, it was bitter and unsuitable for drinking. The people were extremely upset, and named the place Marah which means "bitter". It seemed that their situation had not improved at all, as they'd hoped or expected.

Have you ever been disappointed like this? Perhaps there have been times when you've gotten your hopes up about something, but things didn't work out as you anticipated. Perhaps you believed that God would act in a certain way or that He'd orchestrate certain events to take place, but He didn't work according to your expectations. Have you allowed disappointment to make you bitter, just like the waters at Marah?

II. SWEET WATER (Exodus 15:24-25a)

What do people do when they don't get what they want? They complain of course! The children of Israel were quite good at complaining, as we see repeatedly throughout the exodus account. I am shocked at how quickly these people forgot about the wonderful provision and faithfulness of God who acted continually acted on their behalf. They grumbled as if the LORD was not present or able to help them. Don't we do the same thing today?

And so they approached Moses asking, "What shall we drink?" Fortunately, Moses turned to God and prayed for an answer. The LORD told him to take a tree (probably a branch or small bush) and throw it into the waters. When Moses did so, the water became sweet and potable. The children of Israel and all of their animals were now able to drink freely.

The literal events that took place at Marah teach an important spiritual lesson. In order to transform the bitterness of our lives into sweetness, we must often add something to the equation. In this particular instance, the LORD showed Moses a tree which became the instrument of change. In my life, I have often had a change of perspective by applying God's Word to my situation. It is amazing how the wood of God's goodness and grace has improved the quality and purity of my life. What is God showing you today that, if added to your life, will make your waters sweeter?

III. HEALING WATER (Exodus 15:25b-26)

While the people camped at Marah, the LORD tested them. He told them that if they would listen to and heed the voice of God, and also obey His statutes and commandments, that He would not inflict them with the diseases that He'd visited upon the Egyptians. God promised to be their healer, rather than a source of malady and misery. This was all contingent upon their obedience.

I titled this point in today's sermon "Healing Water" so that it would tie neatly to the other points that are being made. Certainly the waters at Marah did heal, in a sense, the thirsty desires of the people

gathered there. But the promise of God's healing extends far beyond this. He is able to cure our diseases, to mend our brokenness, to alleviate our discomforts, and to restore our health and vitality. The LORD can heal us from any type of sickness - including the physical, emotional, mental, relational, and spiritual. He is our divine Healer!

Why then do people sometimes die even after praying for healing? Why do some disabilities remain uncured despite a person's repeated prayers? How can we as Christians claim that God is our healer when so many are never healed? First, let me say that all people who die and go to heaven experience the most complete and ultimate healing possible. Secondly, the Lord is more concerned about our eternal destinies than our temporal ones and often allows physical infirmities to persist in order to affect the spiritual well-being of ourselves or others. As such, He remains our healer in every circumstance.

IV. ABUNDANT WATER (Exodus 15:27)

After a temporary stay at Marah, the children of Israel set out again following the cloud of God. They came to an oasis paradise named Elim where there were 70 palm trees surround 12 water wells. This place was a dream-come-true for the weary Hebrews who had been wandering around for several days in the Arabian desert. At Elim they found an abundant supply of life-sustaining water.

Based upon the details given in the Bible, I believe that Moses and the people camped at Elim for several weeks - perhaps almost 2 full months. Why not? There was plenty of water there, as well as delicious dates from the palm trees to eat, and cool shade from the blistering desert sun. Elim was an ideal location to rest and find refreshment from the exhaustion that they must have felt.

Elim represents a place of comfort and plenty in the midst of distress and lack. This story brings to mind the words of Jesus who said, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." The Lord is our salvation and strength, just like a lush oasis hidden in the endless expanse of desert.

CONCLUSION

As we wrap up the message today, there are three questions that I believe are appropriate. Listen closely, because one or more of them might apply directly to you and your situation.

One - if your attitude is characterized by bitterness, would you ask God to show you how to make it sweet again? As long as you allow yourself to remain bitter or sour, you will be of no use to God or anyone else. Instead you'll be a source of disappointment and sorrow. Only by seeking and following the direction of the LORD will the waters of your life become sweet.

Two - if you are suffering from pain and affliction of any sort, would you ask God to heal you today? The treatments that this world offers might provide temporary comfort or relief, but only the LORD can truly and completely heal anyone. Listen to Him, obey His commands, and receive the healing that only our

God can provide.

Three - if you are lost or wandering about in the dry wilderness of this life, would you come this morning to the oasis that is found in Jesus Christ? There is absolutely nothing else in this world that can satisfy the thirstiness of your soul. Finding Jesus is your only hope of salvation. Come to Him right now - you'll be so glad that you did!

Our Daily Bread - Exodus 16

Originally Preached on 6/19/2016

“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’” - Matthew 6:9-13

The people of God camped at Elim, a desert oasis, for a few short weeks before moving on. Scripture tells us that when they departed from there they journeyed through the Wilderness of Sin, which was near Mt. Sinai. The LORD was leading them to His holy mountain, where He’d told Moses to come and worship after bringing the people out of Egypt.

God had delivered His children from the hand of Pharaoh. Now He was working in their lives to prepare them for the future. He was developing and discipling them to become the mighty people He’d called them to be, so that when He finally brought them into the Promised Land they would be ready for whatever they might encounter. God used a variety of different means seeking to strengthen the faith of His children.

Though they had recently seen the LORD provide sweetened water at Marah and abundant water at Elim, they soon began to complain once again. They had refilled their water supply, but now became concerned about their lack of food. How would they survive with nothing to eat, and where would they find a reliable source of food in the middle of a desert?

In this morning’s message God will again supernaturally provide for His people’s need. Our focus today will not be on the LORD’s ability to provide - we’ve already seen this displayed clearly and on multiple occasions. Rather, we will discuss the manner in which He provides and the lesson that it teaches about how we are to live as His children.

I. BREAD AND QUAIL (Exodus 16:1-15)

As stated in the introduction, the children of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron accusing them of leading them into the wilderness only to die of hunger. As on previous occasions, the LORD spoke to Moses and told Him how to answer the people’s complaints. God would provide bread for the Israelites in the morning and meat for them in the evening. But how?

Each day, at twilight, thousands quail would descend upon the people. They would land on the ground where they would be easily captured and killed. Thus, the people had plenty of fresh meat to eat. Every morning a new layer of dew would evaporate on the ground leaving behind a thin flaky bread for the people to gather and eat. In this manner, God provided food for the children of Israel.

We have already mentioned in this series that Moses and his followers likely numbered somewhere between 2 and 3 million. Consider for a moment how much quail and bread it would take to feed this amount of people every day for 40 years. I have read estimates that suggest it would take about 4,500 tons of bread and at least 1 quail per person each day to adequately meet this need. To think that God did this regularly, day in and day out, for 4 decades is absolutely astounding!

I have read and studied the accounts recorded in the Gospels when Jesus fed at least 5,000 people on one occasion and at least 4,000 on another with only a few loaves of bread and fish. As miraculous as Jesus' actions were, during the exodus God was feeding literally millions of people every single day for 40 full years with bread in the morning and quail at night.

II. GATHERING THE FOOD (Exodus 16:16-21)

The children of Israel were instructed to gather only enough bread to eat for a single day. The exact measurement given in the Bible is one omer per person. Scholars suggest that an omer is somewhere around 10 dry cups. Thus, every morning, the people would go out and gather their daily bread to supply themselves and their families for the day.

None of the bread was to be saved or accumulated. In other words, surplus amounts could not be kept in storage for future use. Of course, some of the people tried to do this (I probably would have tried, too) - but by the next morning the unused portion had bred worms and become foul. Therefore, it was imperative that the people gather fresh bread every day because none could be saved or kept. Each morning, the excess left on the ground was melted away by the hot sun so that no extra remained.

By providing for the people in this way, God was teaching them to depend upon Him daily. They were forced to rely on God's provision by starting from scratch each new day. They could not accumulate or amass wealth, but rather had to live one day at a time. We would be wise today, as Christians, to do likewise. We need to become more dependent upon God and less dependent upon ourselves. We need to heed the words of Jesus who taught us not to build up treasures here on earth, but rather in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20).

God's word is our daily bread (Deuteronomy 8:3). We need to start each day by reading it and allowing it to speak to us. We should not expect to receive enough of His bread on Sunday mornings to last us all week long - it just doesn't work that way. Contrary to popular opinion, it is not the pastor's job to feed you - it is your responsibility to feed yourself. The life-giving words of the Bible must be gathered anew and afresh every day. Oh that we as Christians would come to understand the importance of personally spending time in God's word every day!

III. REGARDING THE SABBATH (Exodus 16:22-30)

There was an exception given by God to regular daily collection of food. On the sixth day, the Hebrews were to gather two days' worth of bread rather than one. The reason for this was to provide them with

a sufficient amount for both the sixth day and the seventh day. By collecting a double portion, they would not have to gather any bread on the seventh day. The extra day's food would keep from ruining only on that one particular night of the week so that the people would have plenty for the seventh day.

As originally presented in the story of creation, the LORD set aside every seventh day as a Sabbath Day of rest. In this instance, God began teaching the people to formally recognize the Sabbath by not working on that day. It was to be a holy day in which everyone rested from their labor. But some of the people went out to gather bread on the seventh day and were surprised to find none on the ground. The LORD again expressed exasperation with His people.

The concept of the Sabbath Day runs throughout Scripture. Even today orthodox Jews refuse to do any work on the Sabbath Day, which they recognize to be Saturday. We as Christians also continue the tradition of the Sabbath Day, but we recognize it on Sunday in keeping with the practice of the New Testament church. Early Christians celebrated and memorialized the Lord's resurrection by meeting and worshiping on the first day of the week - Sunday.

The emphasis is not to be placed on which particular day we rest, but rather that we do so every seventh day - whether it be Saturday, Sunday, or some other day. The Sabbath Day was instituted so that we as God's people would have one day each week to cease from our worldly pursuits and to focus wholly upon the LORD. It was and is to be a day of refreshing and renewal - both physically and spiritually. Sadly, many Christians today have forgotten the meaning and therefore fail to honor the Sabbath Day.

CONCLUSION

In the closing verses of this chapter we discover that the children of God named the honey-sweet bread "manna". The word manna means "What is it?" because this is the question that they asked when it first appeared. Furthermore, we are told that some of this bread would later be gathered and placed inside the Ark of the Covenant. These verses provide us with a preview of things yet to come, as the Ark did not exist at this point.

The message this morning is not speaking against planning ahead or saving for the future - the Bible encourages us and gives counsel on how to do both. It is not condemning the wealthy or prosperous for having accumulated much. Many of the most faithful men in Scripture were rich. Rather, it is teaching that God's desire is for us to depend fully upon Him every day - not upon ourselves, our stuff, some other person, or anything/anyone else. The Lord is to be our daily bread. We need to trust in Him to be our provision for every new day.

His Banner Over Me - Exodus 17

Originally Preached on 6/27/2016

*"You have given a banner to those who fear You, that it may be displayed because of the truth."
- Psalm 60:4*

In our current series called "The Wandering Church" we have been studying the story of the exodus. Under the leadership of Moses, the children of Israel have fled from Pharaoh and crossed the Red Sea. Now in the region of Midian, they are finally approaching Mt. Sinai (also called Mt. Horeb) where the LORD has been leading them. They have journeyed through the Wilderness of Sin and have arrived at a place called Rephidim.

In our time together today we will consider the events that transpired while the people are camped at Rephidim. It is important to realize that this location is very near to Mt. Sinai, which is called the mountain of God. There are 3 major occurrences that take place at Rephidim, all of which are written about in Exodus 17, and these will be our points of emphasis.

I. WATER (Exodus 17:1-7)

We have already seen how water played an important role in the exodus journey. God had turned bitter water into sweet at Marah, and had provided abundant water at the desert oasis of Elim. But once again the people's water supply began to run short and the complaints began to rise again. Their dissention was so strong that Moses actually feared that the people might stone him to death. So, once again, he turned to the LORD in prayer.

God answered Moses by telling him to gather some elders and pass before the people, thereby gaining their attention. Then he was to take his staff - the same one that he had used when turning the waters of the Nile River into blood back in Egypt - and to strike the rock at Horeb with it. The fact that this rock was called the "rock at Horeb" indicates its proximity to Mt. Horeb or Mt. Sinai. When Moses struck the rock, waters flowed out of it so that the people had plenty to drink.

Moses named this place Massah which means "to test" and Meribah which means "to quarrel". Despite the LORD's continued faithfulness to them, these people tested Him and provoked Him by constantly questioning His ability to provide for their needs. The more things change, the more they stay the same... despite our modern conveniences and enlightenment, we as God's church still question and doubt Him all the time.

Much later in this series we will read of another very similar episode that takes place at another location also called Meribah (found in Numbers 20:8-20). Some theologians have suggested that these 2 stories refer to a single event and are therefore duplicated unnecessarily in scripture. I however believe that they are distinct and separate events, which share many commonalities. This would be comparable to

Jesus' cleansing of the temple twice in the gospels - once near the beginning of His ministry (John 2:10-11) and again in the week before His death (as recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

II. WAR (Exodus 17:8-13)

While still at Rephidim, the people of Amalek came up and attacked the Israelites. While they had never directly engaged in combat with the Egyptians, because the LORD delivered them Himself, they had prepared themselves to fight. Now, for the first time during the exodus journey, the people of God would be called to battle. Moses selected Joshua to serve as their military commander, and he assembled an army of men go out and meet the Amalekite threat.

Apparently the Hebrews arrived at Rephidim in stages (see verse 1) with some groups getting there earlier while other straggled behind. According to a passage found in Deuteronomy 25:17-18, the Amalekites attacked the rear flank of the people, probably trying to cut them off from the larger group already ahead at the camp. When it became known that they were under attack, Joshua led his army to confront the enemy.

“Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God.” - Deut. 25:17-18

During the battle, Moses took his brother Aaron and trusted companion Hur up onto a nearby hill to watch the fighting as it took place. The exact identity of Hur is unknown, but some have suggested that he was either Moses' nephew (Miriam's son) or his brother-in-law (Miriam's husband). Either way, he was a dear friend. From their vantage point, these 3 men watched the combat raging in the valley below.

Moses realized that when he held his hands up Israel prevailed, but when he put them down Amalek prevailed. Wanting to ensure the victory for his people, Moses put his hands up but his arms soon grew tired and began to droop. Therefore, they placed a large stone under Moses so the he could sit. Aaron and Hur then took their places on either side of Moses and held up his weary arms until Israel had won the battle.

This story is a wonderful illustration of how we need each other. There are times in all of our lives when we grow weak and tired. The battle before us seems too great and our strength is all but gone. Often in these trying moments God uses our friends, family, and/or others to step in and be our support. We are called to “hold up the arms” of our friends when they can't do it for themselves. By facing the battles of this world together, we can better ensure the victory that God has in store.

III. WORSHIP (Exodus 17:14-16)

After the Amalekites were defeated the LORD spoke to Moses. He told him to write down in a book that

the Amalekites would one day be completely annihilated from the pages of history. He told Moses to share this news with Joshua. This point is reemphasized in the Deuteronomy 25 passage I mentioned earlier. God would eventually destroy the Amalekites because they did not fear His name and because they continually harassed His people.

“Therefore it shall come about when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget.” - Deut. 25:19

Moses wrote that the LORD had sworn to eradicate Amalek once and for all. Some 300 or more years later, during the reign of King Saul, God instructed the Israelites to carry out this promise. While killing most of them, Saul did not completely finish the job and some Amalekites remained. However, in the book of 1st Chronicles we read that the descendants of Simeon eventually wiped out the remnant that was left. Thus, God kept His word and blotted out the Amalekites forever.

Back to our story... the enemy had retreated and the people of God rejoiced. Moses built an altar at Rephidim and named it “The LORD Is My Banner”. We can understand the meaning of this phrase by thinking of a banner as a flag. When armies go into battle under the colors of a certain flag, it means that they are fighting on behalf of and in allegiance to whatever nation that flag represents. In the same way, when we face the struggles of this current life we should fight in the name of and under the banner of God Almighty. It is His flag that should always wave over our lives.

CONCLUSION

Archaeologists have discovered a rock near the suggested site of Mt. Sinai that many believe to be the rock at Horeb. It is over 5 stories tall, split down the middle, and shows signs of water erosion at its base. Nearby, there is an altar built of large stones. Pictures of these locations are available online. These serve to authenticate the truthfulness of the exodus account.

When we consider the events that took place at Rephidim, there are a few applications that we should highlight before we close the message today....

The first is that we should not test or provoke God like the people did at Meribah. We are reminded of this by Jesus’ own words during His temptation in the wilderness. The second is that we should support each other, by being present to assist and hold up one another’s arms during times of trouble. And finally, we should be allegiant to and wholly devoted to God alone and allow His banner to fly over our lives. We are His people, and He is our God!

Father-in-Law Knows Best - Exodus 18

Originally Preached on 7/10/2016

“But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.” - 2 Thessalonians 3:13

Two weeks ago we reviewed the events recorded in Scripture that occurred among the Children of Israel while they were camped at Rephidim. It was there that the people drank water which flowed from the Rock at Horeb. It was there that the Hebrews were attacked by and subsequently overcame the Amalekites as Moses held up his arms. It was there that Moses built an altar to worship God and called it “The LORD Is My Banner”.

Following their stay at Rephidim, the entire assembly journeyed to the foot of Mt. Sinai where they set up camp. Moses and his followers would remain stationed at Mt. Sinai for the next 2 years. While there, God would teach them many lessons and provide them with instruction and direction for how to live as His chosen people. At Mt. Sinai the LORD sought to disciple Israel, and to develop her for the future yet to come.

The first episode we read about that took place following Moses’ arrival at Mt. Sinai is a family reunion of sorts. Moses’ father-in-law Jethro, along with his wife and children, came to see him there at the mountain of God. This morning we will read and study about what happened during their visit, and how it applies to us today.

I. A FAMILY REUNION (Exodus 18:1-12)

Earlier in this series - back in Exodus 2 - we learned that Moses grew up in Egypt, but fled to Midian as a young man. While living there, he married and the happy couple had children. Moses’ family lived with and he also worked for his father-in-law Jethro (also called Reuel) shepherding his flocks. Jethro was the priest of Midian. When Moses encountered God at the burning bush and returned to Egypt, he left Jethro and his family behind. But now - many months later - his journey had led him back to Midian and to Mt. Sinai. When his family heard of his whereabouts they came to see him and hear about his exploits.

The biblical text focuses mostly upon the interaction between Moses and Jethro, but I want to consider briefly Moses’ reunion with his wife Zipporah. Remember that the two of them had parted on poor terms. He had originally planned to take her and his sons with him back to Egypt before the exodus began, but changed his mind along the way and sent them back. She was quite upset and angry with Moses when last they’d seen each other (Exodus 4:24-26). I can’t help but wonder about how the two of them got along once they were reunited. Many scholars conclude that their relationship was mended and that Zipporah and her children joined Moses at Mt. Sinai and therefore became participants in the rest of the exodus story.

Jethro was amazed as Moses told him about how God had delivered the Children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Upon hearing the story, Jethro rejoiced greatly and declared that these miracles proved that the LORD was greater than all other gods. He even offered a burnt offering and sacrifices to God. Aaron and many of the elders joined Moses and together they shared a great meal with Jethro, and most likely Zipporah and the children as well. It was a wonderful reunion of Moses' family.

II. A FATIGUING TASK (Exodus 18:13-16)

During his visit, Jethro observed Moses' daily activities. Moses would spend all day sitting and judging between the people. In other words, he would listen to their complaints and disputes with one another and then respond to them in accordance with God's will and law. Stated another way, he spent all of his time dealing with and trying to resolve other people's problems in a manner that would be pleasing to God. Notice that when Jethro approached him about it, Moses defended his actions as necessary and important.

I recently spoke with a young pastor friend who expressed the same sentiment as Moses did. He told me that he was working long hours every day and that the demand from his congregation and the community never seemed to slow down. He went on to say the work he was called to do in the ministry was the most important thing that he could be doing, and he was determined to give it his very best. As such, he was dedicating almost all of his time and energy to the church, because he felt that this is what God desired and deserved.

Such a testimony is common among pastors and ministers. Because of their deep love for God and his people, they willingly exhaust themselves in the service of their congregations. Many of them, just like Moses, try to do all of the ministry themselves because they want to ensure that it is done in a way that honors God. Many pastors are hesitant to trust others with leadership responsibilities, because they fear that the work will not be done as well as it should be. This is a self-inflicted burden that only increases that load already placed upon pastors.

While the congregation does not necessarily expect the pastor to carry such a heavy weight, they often allow him to do so without offering much if any assistance. The people knew that Moses was spending all of his time judging their problems, but there is no indication that they cared about how it was affecting him or his family. No one seemingly understood Moses' plight except for his father-in-law Jethro. Certainly Moses had placed most of this burden upon himself in his zeal to serve God rightly, but the people seemed content to let him carry it largely alone. We see this same phenomenon occurring in our churches today.

III. A FATHER-IN-LAW'S ADVICE (Exodus 18:17-27)

Jethro was the closest thing that Moses ever had to an actual father. He cared deeply for Moses' well-being and recognized the heavy toll that was befalling his son-in-law. Jethro told Moses that he was doing too much, and that if he continued he'd wear both himself and the people out. He informed

Moses that the task was simply too great for him to do all alone. He advised Moses to focus himself upon being the people's leader and teacher, and to solicit help dealing with the people's disputes and problems. In short, Jethro told Moses to lighten his load by delegating many of the lesser responsibilities to others. In keeping with his father-in-law's counsel, Moses appointed godly leaders over the people to handle their more minor issues, which freed him to focus on only the major things.

Moses wisely took Jethro's advice and made the necessary changes to prevent himself from burning out. This can be very hard to do, because it requires that a leader relinquish control of some things. For those who are leery of giving up control, delegating can be extremely difficult. Still, it is imperative. No matter how energetic you may think you are, the fact is that at some point you will burn out. This happens to pastors and spiritual leaders all the time. Let's be honest - ministry is exhausting. We need to heed the advice of Jethro and realize that we can't do all the work alone and that to try to do so is "not good". Such foolish efforts will ultimately damage us, our families, and our churches.

In the New Testament Paul encourages the churches to not become "weary in well-doing". All-too-often we interpret this to mean that no matter how much we take on, we should rest on occasion so as not to wear ourselves out. But in light of today's message, perhaps we should understand Paul's words as more than a call to get enough rest but also as a warning not overload ourselves with too much work. There are many preachers out there today, myself included at times, who are burning their candle at both ends. Perhaps they do need to be getting more rest, but could it be that they also need to be doing less work?

CONCLUSION

In the closing verse of the chapter, Moses' father-in-law bids farewell and returns to his home. As mentioned earlier, it is probable that his wife Zipporah and their two sons stayed with Moses and the people at Mt. Sinai. Though his trip had been short, Jethro's visit was critical to the survival of the people and the continuance of the exodus. Can you imagine what might of happened if Moses had burnt himself out and stepped down as their leader? The entire history of Israel would have been changed! Thank God for Jethro's advice and for Moses' willingness to follow it.

Don't mistake the message today as an excuse to be lazy. Trust me - Moses was certainly not lazy and he did not neglect the most important issues that his people faced. Moses did not delegate all of his responsibilities away so that he could sit around doing nothing all day. On the contrary - he remained extremely busy and dedicated to the LORD's service. Moses simply realized that he needed to focus upon the things that God had called him to do, and allow others to handle the rest. By trying to do everything himself, Moses was preventing others from fulfilling their own God-given ministry. We as pastors still do these same things today.

There are 2 major truths that I want to reemphasize as I wrap-up. The first is that our congregations need to be more keenly aware of the tremendous burden being carried (many times in silence) by their pastors and leaders and they need to step up to help. They should neither expect or allow their pastors

to do all the work of ministry alone. The second truth is that we as pastors must quit trying to carry the entire load by ourselves. We must learn to take care of ourselves and to share the weight with others. If this means that some things get left undone, then so be it. By heeding Jethro's advice, both pastors and people can become more healthy and the church can remain strong and vibrant even in the face of its never-ending demands.

The Ten Commandments - Exodus 19-20

Originally Preached on 7/17/2016

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." - John 14:15

We live in a generation that spends very little time reading or studying the Bible for themselves. Most people accept whatever they see or hear about God from their pastors or teachers as true, without ever actually checking the Scriptures to make sure. People by the thousands flock to theaters to watch Hollywood movies or sit in their recliners watching television shows that supposedly depict biblical stories, not realizing that often times the media's portrayal is not very accurate. Perhaps this is one reason why God's word warns us to be cautious about what we believe and to check everything against the Bible.

Many of us here today have seen the classic film "The Ten Commandments" starring Charlton Heston. We have also heard this story told and retold since our days in children's Sunday School. But if you've never actually studied it carefully for yourself, then you probably believe that this event happened differently than it actually did...

Moses and the people of God have set up camp at Mt. Sinai. Not long after their arrival Moses reunited with his family. Following their visit, the Bible turns its attention toward Moses' ongoing interaction with God. During the remaining chapters of the book of Exodus, Moses will climb Mt. Sinai on at least eight separate occasions to speak with the LORD.

In this morning's message we will examine Moses' first three trips up the mountain, why he went, and what happened in between each ascent. We will also read about God's original giving of the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel, and see how the actual details of the story as written in God's Word differ from the familiar rendition that most Christians believe.

I. GOD DWELLS ATOP THE MOUNTAIN (Exodus 19:1-15)

God is omnipresent, meaning that He is present and readily available everywhere. That said, we also see His manifest presence at specific places throughout the Bible. He was in the Garden of Eden when Adam was created, He is seated enthroned in Heaven in the book of Job and in Revelation, and He was present in the Holy of Holies during the era of the tabernacle and temple. Thus, we can understand that God's presence is both general and specific simultaneously. While the children of Israel were camped at Mt. Sinai, the manifest presence of God dwelt atop the mountain.

God summoned Moses to the mountain top. When Moses reached the peak, God gave him a simple message to deliver to the people waiting below. He said, "If these people will obey my commandments then I will make them into a holy nation all My own". Moses went back down and presented this simple condition to the congregation. All the people heartily agreed to obey the LORD, so Moses climbed back

up the mountain a second time to tell God what they'd said.

Upon hearing that the people had consented to obey the His commands, God instructed Moses to prepare them for His coming. In three days, the LORD's manifest presence would come down from the mountaintop where He could speak to the people directly. He would then tell them the specific commandments that they'd agreed to obey. He would appear in a thick cloud that was to be visible to all of the assembly. His presence would be signaled by the trumpet blast. In the meantime Moses was to consecrate the people, to ensure they were ceremonially clean, and to set up a boundary at the mountain's base that none of them were allowed to cross.

II. GOD DESCENDS UPON THE MOUNTAIN (Exodus 19:16-25)

The people prepared for the LORD's arrival and on the morning of the third day there was thunder and lighting and a thick cloud upon the mountain. The trumpet sounded, alerting the people that God had come and Moses led the people from their camp out to the foot of Mt. Sinai, careful not to cross the boundary line that had been marked previously. The people trembled fearfully in the presence of the Almighty God.

God had come down upon Mt. Sinai with fire and the whole mountain was covered in smoke and shook violently. The trumpet blasts continued to grow louder and louder. Suddenly the LORD spoke in a thunderous voice and called Moses to return to the mountaintop for a third time. Moses went up again, through the dense smoke and as the mountain of God quaked. All the while, the people waited and watched. When Moses got to the top, the LORD issued additional warnings for the people and the priests gathered below. God told Moses to go back down, to get Aaron, and then to come back up with him once more. Furthermore, he reminded Moses not to let any of the other people past the boundary line. So Moses climbed back down the mountain to find his brother Aaron.

III. GOD'S DECLARATION FROM THE MOUNTAIN (Exodus 20:1-17)

When Moses reached the bottom of the mountain for the third time, God began to speak to all of the children of Israel from His place on the mountain. It is important to understand that God was speaking to all of the people - not just to Moses. This included not only the majority of Hebrews, but also those foreigners who had come with them (Exodus 12:38). As such, these commandments that were spoken applied to everyone who'd committed themselves to be a child of God.

God listed in the hearing of all the people that morning what are now known collectively as the Ten Commandments. They are as follows:

1. You shall have no other gods before the LORD.
2. You shall not make idols or practice idolatry.
3. You shall not use God's name in vain.
4. You shall remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.

5. You shall honor your father and mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's possessions.

These ten commandments codified in certain terms the basis of moral law for God's people. Over the centuries countless civilizations have referred to these as the foundational determinants of right versus wrong. The Ten Commandments established a moral standard by which all people should seek to live. Almost every set of laws ever written by men to govern nations or states are rooted in the principles set forth by God in the Ten Commandments.

For the sake of this series, we are not going to delve into each of these commandments individually - we will save that for another time. Suffice it to say that the first four dealt with the people's relationship with God, while the final six dealt with the people's relationships with one another. By adhering to these ten comprehensive rules, God's people could ensure that their behaviors would be acceptable and honorable to Him.

IV. GOD DISTURBS THOSE AROUND THE MOUNTAIN (Exodus 20:18-20)

As the people saw and heard the LORD speaking through the thunder, lightning, trumpets, and smoke they sheepishly distanced themselves from the mountain. The manifest presence of God was more than they could take, and they were terrified. Not wishing to endure it any longer, they approached Moses and asked him to serve as their mediator. They requested that God speak to Moses first, and then Moses would relay His message to them. The people desired that the LORD not speak directly to them, because it was too frightful and overwhelming.

Moses tried to comfort the congregation and told them not to be afraid, but they obviously did not listen. Moses explained that God was testing them so that they would understand the seriousness of His commands. He was making such a strong impression because He wanted the people to obey and not to die as the result of their sin. Moses contended that God's grand and somewhat intimidating appearance was intended for the people's own good. Still they insisted that Moses serve as the go-between from this point forward, and he agreed.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between God, Moses, and the children of Israel while they were camped at Mt. Sinai is quite interesting. God's manifest presence dwelt on top of the mountain, where only Moses was permitted to go. As such, he served as a liaison between God and His people. This arrangement was a precursor to the priesthood, in which the priest would serve as the mediator.

God gave the Ten Commandments to His children so that they would know for themselves what constituted sin. The law made it possible for the people to make their own informed choices about their behaviors. By choosing obedience to His commands, Israel could demonstrate their love for and devotion to God. As Christians today, we can still do likewise by living in accordance with God's unchanging expectations. Fortunately, we have a much fuller understanding of God's grace through Jesus Christ than they had. We know that the law was never intended to save us. That said, it still remains useful if we aspire to live godly lives.

Those who truly love God will seek to keep His commandments voluntarily because they want to honor Him, not because they feel as though they have to obey in order to receive salvation. By studying God's laws, commandments, and statutes we can gain a greater appreciation for His character and a deeper understanding of His holiness. Finally, we as Christians should not view the Ten Commandments as obsolete or out-of-date, but rather as important and contemporary guidelines for righteous living.

Moses on the Mountain - Exodus 20-31

Originally Preached on 7/24/2016

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” - Matthew 5:17-19

When we concluded our message last week, the people of God were gathered at the base of Mt. Sinai. God had descended upon the mountain with fire and spoken directly to the entire congregation. When the children of Israel found themselves standing in close proximity to the manifest presence of the LORD they trembled and felt extremely uncomfortable before Him. As such, the people asked Moses to intervene by serving as a mediator between themselves and God. Moses agreed to do so.

Apparently God stopped speaking to the entire assembly and waited for Moses to approach Him. When Moses drew near, God continued His declaration to Moses individually. We consider this to be Moses' fourth ascent up Mt. Sinai. God listed numerous ordinances for His people to obey, in addition to the Ten Commandments that He'd previously spoken. Moses took these back to camp, wrote them down, and read them to the people waiting there. He also built an altar, sacrificed animals, and confirmed the LORD's covenant.

Moses then returned to the mountaintop for a fifth time along with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 elders of Israel who had been invited by God to join him. This large group saw the LORD and a pavement of sapphire beneath His feet that was as clear as the sky. They worshiped Him there on the mountain and again affirmed their covenant with God before returning to the camp below.

God soon summoned Moses to join Him on the mountain for a sixth meeting. This encounter would last for 40 days and nights. During this time, God instructed Moses to build the tabernacle and provided him with specific details for its construction. The LORD also prescribed several rules and procedures for the priests who'd be working in the tabernacle. In addition to these instructions, God also gave Moses two tablets written in His own hand that contained the Ten Commandments.

In the 12 chapters we are discussing this morning, God presented many specific laws, commandments, ordinances, and statutes to Moses. It is not the purpose of this series to explore them all individually. To do so would take a considerable amount of time, as there are some 613 different laws found in the Old Testament. But we will spend some time this morning considering the 3 distinct categories of these laws, and how these categories relate to us as Christians today.

I. CEREMONIAL LAW (Exodus 25-31)

The first category is Ceremonial Law. When the LORD spoke to Moses during their sixth meeting on the mountaintop, God gave him many instructions regarding the tabernacle and the priesthood. Many more of these types of laws are given in the book of Leviticus, which is in effect a handbook for the Levitical priesthood. Ceremonial laws are those that pertain to the manner in which Israel was to worship God. This would include those statutes related to purity and cleanliness, religious festivals and observances, types of and procedures for offering sacrifices, and so on.

Much of the Ceremonial Law pointed symbolically to the coming of Jesus Christ. It was specifically tied to Israel and their religious practices. While God certainly loved and desired repentance from people living in the surrounding Gentile nations, as demonstrated throughout the Old Testament and notably in the book of Jonah, it is obvious that these nations did not follow Ceremonial Law like the Jews did. This category of laws created a religious system, unique to Israel, which was intended to testify of God Almighty and of the coming Messiah.

When Jesus came to this earth and died on the cross for the sin of mankind, the purpose that undergirded the Ceremonial Law was completed. There was no longer a need to foretell the coming of Christ because He'd already come. The Apostle Paul and the writer of Hebrews both explained in the New Testament that the strict practice of the Ceremonial Law was and is no longer necessary. Jesus himself is our sacrificial lamb, our High Priest, our Sabbath rest, our means of purity and cleanliness, and so on. The Ceremonial Law was and is satisfied through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

II. JUDICIAL LAW (Exodus 21-23)

The second category is the Judicial or Civil Law. These types of ordinances are in view during Moses's fourth conversation with God on Mt. Sinai. These deal primarily with Israel's daily practices and living. Some such examples include those laws relating to personal relationships (servants/masters, husbands/wives, etc.); property rights; injuries, damages, and appropriate punishments; and a wide variety other issues.

The Judicial Law sought to define that which was legal versus illegal in everyday living. It provided guidelines for the secular governance of the people, similar to what our legislature does today. These laws applied specifically to the nation of Israel, and many were closely tied to the cultural practices of the time. In fact, several of these Judicial Laws seem somewhat strange and almost nonsensical to us living in modern society today.

The Judicial Law was intended to establish a unique nation that would conduct its affairs and operate distinctly different from the rest of the world. It sought to highlight Israel as the peculiar people chosen by God to be His representative nation on the earth. When the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah and thereby broke their covenant with God, the LORD chose the Church to replace Israel. The purpose of exalting Israel before the nations was altered and the Judicial Law was rendered obsolete. It is now up to Christians, who function under the New Covenant, to be the salt and light of the earth.

III. MORAL LAW (Exodus 20)

The third category is the Moral Law. The Ten Commandments are the essence of the Moral Law, though there are other specific laws that arguably would also fit into this category. Unlike the other ordinances and statutes which were dictated to Moses and then relayed to the people, many of these laws were spoken directly by God to the whole assembly. In fact Moses received a written copy of the Ten Commandments from God twice while on the mountain. The Moral Law consists of principles that declare the LORD's holy nature and reflect His divine will.

The Moral Law transcends the issue of legal versus illegal and speaks instead to the basis of right and wrong. As such, its application extends far beyond the nation Israel. The precepts set forth in the Moral Law are both universal and timeless. They also seem to be inherent to our created consciousness. All people (to some degree) seem to have an inborn, natural sense of the difference between right and wrong or good and evil.

The Moral Law pertains to everyone, everywhere. It will exist as long as God exists, because it is an extension of His divine nature and character. This being the case, Christians should seek to obey the Moral Law. While it is true that the LORD is longsuffering and forgiving of our failures, He still desires for His people to live and behave in a godly and righteous manner. We should strive to be like Jesus, who demonstrated the honesty, integrity, and love which is woven into the very fiber of the Moral Law.

CONCLUSION

Jesus fulfilled the entire Law - the Moral, the Ceremonial, and the Judicial. In other words, He perfectly kept its intent. He lived without sin, having never violated God's law on a single point. Then He died on the cross as our unblemished and undefiled Lamb, making the eternal atonement of mankind possible. Jesus substituted His righteousness for our wickedness, and bore the punishment that we all deserved. Because of Jesus, grace has forever prevailed over works. Christians understand that salvation is not and cannot be earned through obedience to the Law, but rather only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus also revealed the true meaning of the Law. Its purpose was never to prevent people from sinning, but rather to expose our inability to keep from sinning. It shined a spotlight on our wretchedness. The impossible requirements of the Law declared our need for grace, mercy, forgiveness, and salvation. The Old Covenant was founded upon Israel's obedience to the Law of Moses. The New Covenant is founded upon the grace of God that comes to all Christians through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught that all of the Law is summed up in 2 simple commands - to love the LORD with all of your heart, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. While strict obedience to the letter of the Old Testament Law is unnecessary for salvation, practicing the principles set forth by these laws is perhaps the best way to show our love for God and for our neighbor. Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. That said, Christians would be wise to study and practice the ideals that undergird

and led to the creation of the Mosaic Law. Stated another way, we may not necessarily follow the letter of the law, but we should follow the spirit of the law (Romans 7:6).

The Golden Calf - Exodus 32

Originally Preached on 7/31/2016

“Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile, and their precious things are of no profit; even their own witnesses fail to see or know, so that they will be put to shame. Who has fashioned a god or cast an idol to no profit? Behold, all his companions will be put to shame, for the craftsmen themselves are mere men. Let them all assemble themselves, let them stand up, let them tremble, let them together be put to shame.” - Isaiah 44:9-11

We are about halfway through our current sermon series called “The Wandering Church”. We are exploring the life of Moses and the events of the exodus. This is one of the most compelling adventures ever told. Over the course of this study we have discovered many truths that God taught the children of Israel some 3500 years ago that still have direct and meaningful application to His people today.

In the last verse of chapter 24, which we spoke about last Sunday, Moses and Joshua climbed up Mt. Sinai again. Joshua stopped at some point, while Moses went on ahead alone to the peak. This was Moses’ sixth trip up the mountain, and he was there for forty days and nights. God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle and gave him specific instructions for doing so. He also gave Moses two stone tablets that had the Ten Commandments written on them.

Meanwhile, back at the camp, the people waited for their return. With both Moses and Joshua gone, Aaron had been left in charge of the group. Everything was fine at first - no major problems to speak of - but soon the people became restless and impatient. Their leader Moses had been gone for several weeks - apparently much longer than any of his previous ascents. They began to wonder. What might of happened to him? When would he come back, if ever? What if he had abandoned them there? What were they going to do?

Their needless worry and irrational fear prompted them to make a horrible decision. They chose to commit an unthinkable sin against God, which resulted in severe and fatal consequences. In the message this morning we are going to consider the people’s idolatry at Mt. Sinai and discuss how God responded to it.

I. THE PEOPLE SIN (Exodus 32:1-6)

After Moses had been gone to the mountain for many days, the people surrounded Aaron and urged him to make a god for them to lead in Moses’ absence. It seems that, for whatever reason, they did not believe that Moses was coming back. Astonishingly, Aaron agreed to their request. He collected jewelry from the people, much of which had been taken when Israel plundered the Egyptians, and melted it down to form a golden calf. He then built an altar to it and led the congregation in worshiping the idol.

Bible students have differing opinions regarding Aaron’s willingness to participate in the sinful actions of

the people. Some say he had such a lukewarm faith that he voluntarily went along with the whole Golden Calf incident. Others go so far as to say that much of it was his idea. I disagree with this line of thinking. Remember how the people had complained so severely at times that Moses had felt threatened that he'd be stoned. I choose to give Aaron the benefit of the doubt (to some degree), and suggest that he too felt threatened and cowered into making and worshiping the golden calf. This is my personal interpretation of the story - somewhat reminiscent of Pontius Pilate. Still, he exhibited weakness and shouldn't have done what he did.

The actions of the congregation were even more deplorable when you consider that God had spoken audibly to them from Mt. Sinai not long before and had commanded them, among other things, not to make or worship idols. Their obedience to these commands was the basis of their covenant agreement with God. Yet here they were, the ink not even dry on the contract so-to-speak, violating the very terms that they'd promised to follow.

II. THE LORD'S ANGER (Exodus 32:7-14)

Meanwhile, at the summit of Mt. Sinai, the all-knowing God saw what the people are doing down below and told Moses to hurry down the mountain and put a stop to it. God was furious that His own children had so quickly forsaken the commandments. The LORD expressed His intention to destroy the people and to make His nation from the descendants of Moses instead.

Despite the sinfulness and stubbornness of his followers, Moses still loved the children of Israel. Immediately he began entreating the LORD not to destroy them. Moses reminded God of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) and urged Him to relent. Upon hearing Moses' heartfelt plea, the LORD changed his mind and decided not to utterly wipe the people out.

I am stuck by the contrasting events that are occurring simultaneously in this chapter. While the assembly below was practicing gross acts of sin, the leader above was interceding desperately on their behalf. This causes me to think of Jesus' parable about the Prodigal Son. Whether you are the parent of a wayward child, the teacher of a rowdy class, or even a citizen of a rebellious nation - we need to pray earnestly for those who have lost their way.

III. MOSES TAKES CHARGE (Exodus 32:15-29)

On his way down the mountain, Moses rejoined his friend Joshua. As they neared the base, the two of them could hear noise coming from the camp, but were unsure what is happening. When they get near enough to see what was actually going on Moses exploded in anger. He threw down the stone tablets that God had given him and they shattered. He then seized the golden calf, burned it, and ground the charred remains into powder. He then poured the powder into the stream (see Deuteronomy 9:21) that the people drank from - yikes!!!

Then Moses turned to his brother Aaron and began to chastise him. Moses had left Aaron in charge and

trusted him to maintain control over the people. Instead Aaron had allowed the people to digress into idolatry, revelry, and wickedness. The entire congregation was in chaos, and Aaron himself was actively involved in their sinfulness. When confronted by Moses, all Aaron could do is offer lame and empty excuses for his incompetence and guilt.

The people were out of control, so Moses took drastic measures to restore order. He gathered the sons of Levi who were faithful to God and, on the LORD's orders, sent them through the camp to kill the chief offenders in this incident. Some 3,000 men were executed as punishment for their idolatrous behavior in association with the golden calf. It took severe and drastic measures to curb the people's rebellious spirit and bring them back under control. Unfortunately, this is often still the case today.

VI. THE SEVENTH ASCENT (Exodus 32:30-35; 33:1-3)

The next day, Moses publicly charged the people of committing a great sin. By this point his righteous anger against them had subsided, and now he sought only their forgiveness and restoration. So he scaled the mountain for the seventh time - to see God and to make atonement for the people.

Moses asked the LORD to forgive the people for their sin, but went on to say that if He wouldn't do it, to hold him accountable along with the people. In other words, Moses stated that he did not want to be associated with an unforgiving god. This presented an important teaching opportunity in which God revealed that people are held accountable individually for their own sin. This is an important and timeless truth for us to grasp.

Of course, our loving God forgave the people and promised that His angel would still go before them as they journeyed. But the punishment for and consequences of their sin still remained. God stated that His manifest presence would no longer go with them. You see, forgiveness of guilt is not the same thing as dismissal of punishment. God is always willing to forgive those who sincerely seek His forgiveness, but often times the dire consequences of one's sin can linger for years to come.

CONCLUSION

I don't presently know anyone who literally worships a golden statue shaped like a calf. As a matter of fact, I have never known anyone that did so. But I do know of many people who worship idols in other forms. The painful reality is that idolatry is alive and well in our world today.

"American Idol" is one of the most popular television shows in recent memory. I have nothing against the show per se, and have watched it myself on several occasions in the past. That said, I want to consider its title for just a moment. For many people in America (and elsewhere by the way) the fame, fortune, and celebrity represented on the show have become idols. We worship those who have attained them and aspire to do likewise at all costs. We often place these graven images, which we've crafted in our hearts and minds, before the LORD. We mistake worldly success for the blessing of God - and we suffer the consequences.

As we close the message, can I ask you honestly - what golden calves are present in your life right now? Who or what are you truly worshiping? Where does the bulk of your time and money go? To whom or to what is the best of your energy given? Does your lifestyle testify that you are a child of God? Perhaps it is time to realign your priorities, to burn your idols, and to place God first again.

A Bright, Shiny Face - Exodus 33-34

Originally Preached on 8/7/2016

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” - 2 Corinthians 3:8

Last Sunday we read that Moses had climbed Mt. Sinai again, this time hoping to secure forgiveness for Israel because they had made and worshiped a golden calf. God lovingly agreed to forgive them, and promised that His angel would go before them as they continued on their journey. He assured Moses that the people would still be blessed with the LORD’s favor and protection. However, due to their severe sin, God’s manifest presence would no longer travel with the Hebrew children.

When the congregation was told that God’s personal fullness would not be escorting them anymore, they were absolutely devastated. They mourned bitterly. The pilgrims took off all of the fine jewelry that they’d be wearing since the exodus began and put it away for the remainder of the journey. This served as a visible reminder that the possessions they had were of no value compared to the presence of God in their lives.

The prospect that God’s immediate glory would be absent from Israel’s midst prompted Moses to intercede for them yet again. Ultimately, this troubling issue would lead him to go up the mountain one last time. His eighth journey to the summit of Mt. Sinai is the last of his ascents recorded in Scripture. As you might suspect, something quite remarkable happened while he was up there...

The message today will center around Moses’ final encounter with God on Mt. Sinai and the events that followed immediately thereafter. I have titled this sermon “A Bright, Shiny Face”, and I’m certain that you’ll understand why before we get finished...

I. SHOW ME YOUR GLORY (Exodus 33:7-23)

Since their arrival at Mt. Sinai, God’s manifest presence had dwelt upon the mountaintop. As such, Moses had climbed the peak on repeated occasions to speak directly with the LORD. But this arrangement was beginning to change. Moses had set up a tent, a good distance outside of the camp, where he would go and meet with God face-to-face. This “tent of meeting” could not have been the tabernacle, because the tabernacle had not yet been built. Nevertheless, it was a special place where Moses would go to speak with God without having to scale the mountain.

When God announced that His personal presence would be withdrawn from the group, all of Israel was deeply saddened. In response, Moses withdrew to the tent of meeting to intercede on their behalf. He prayed to God asking Him to reconsider, stating that apart from His presence the people would no longer be a unique nation upon the earth. The Hebrews were truly sorry for their sin and genuinely repentant. And so, once again, God consented to Moses’ petition and agreed to continue traveling

manifestly with the people.

Delighted by the LORD's answer, Moses boldly went a step further and asked God to show him His glory. Though no man can see the LORD's face and live, God made particular arrangements for Moses to catch a glimpse His glory. Moses was to be covered by the hand of God while standing in the cleft of a rock on top of Mt. Sinai as His glory passed by. God would remove His hand at the appropriate time so that Moses could see His back.

II. THE COVENANT RENEWED (Exodus 34:1-28)

Before returning to the mountaintop one last time, Moses cut two stone tablets to replace those he'd shattered. He took them with him as he went. God rewrote the Ten Commandments on these tablets. Moses made this final climb alone, and stayed on the mountain for another forty days and forty nights. He fasted from both food and drink for the entire time. While there, he saw the glory of the LORD pass by just as God had promised.

During this final trip up Mt. Sinai, God reviewed all of the laws and commandments that He'd given previously. Moses carefully wrote them all down again. This process must have taken several days to complete. By reiterating His commands, God was effectively renewing His covenant with Israel even though they had sinned against Him and broken their word. God had forgiven His people and still intended to make of them a great nation of His own possession.

On the previous occasion when Moses tarried on the mountaintop for over a month, the people below grew restless and unruly - and bad things happened. Notice that no mention is made of them this time around. Whereas before the two went to Mt. Sinai together, now Joshua has stayed back in the camp and Moses has gone alone. I assume that he kept things in proper order, as opposed to what Aaron had done. This provided an opportunity for Joshua to gain experience leading the entire congregation, as he would eventually become Moses' successor.

III. MOSES' FACE SHINES (Exodus 34:29-35)

Moses had been in the presence of God Almighty for forty days and nights. From his vantage point in the cleft of the rock he had seen the glory of the LORD pass by. As a result of his closeness to God, Moses' face shone brightly. When he came down the mountain and returned to the camp, the entire congregation saw his face beaming. They were afraid to come near him. Nevertheless, Moses called them all together and ordered them to obey all of the commands that God had given to him.

Moses then put a veil over his face to cover his shining skin. He kept it on whenever he was out among the people, but would remove it whenever entering the tent of meeting to speak with God. The veil worn by Moses served as a barrier of sorts between the glory of God which shone on his face and the assembly. It foreshadowed the veil of the tabernacle and the temple which also separated the people from the manifest presence of God. This separation was removed when Jesus died on the cross and the

veil was rent in two from top to bottom.

The Bible does not state how long Moses' face shined, but I suspect that it was for quite some time. Whenever he would converse with God in the tent of meeting, the brightness of his face would be restored. Moses was literally glowing for the LORD. How awesome is that? At some point his skin probably began to fade and eventually returned to normal. Bummer...

CONCLUSION

As we continue our study through the exodus, you will notice that Moses does not climb Mt. Sinai to speak with God anymore. From this point forward he will meet with God at other locations, such as in the tent of meeting. In the closing chapters of Exodus, the attention shifts to the construction and completion of the tabernacle - this will be the subject of the message next week. The tabernacle will serve as God's new dwelling place as the people journey onward from their camp at Mt. Sinai.

There are a couple of applications from this story that I want to emphasize before we close. The first one is this - the presence of God in our lives is more important than the presents of God in our lives. Let me rephrase - our possessions are empty and cheap substitutes for the personal presence of God. We need Him more than we need "stuff", and we should therefore desire Him more than earthly things.

The second point is related to the first - if we have been in the presence of God it should be visible to others. People should be able to witness the light of God shining in and through our lives, just as the children of Israel saw Moses' face beaming. It is impossible to spend a substantial amount of quality time with God and not be affected by it. Prolonged exposure to His glory will cause you to glow brightly - both physically and spiritually. That said...

Are you shining brightly for Jesus today? Can other people see clear evidence that you have spent time in His presence recently? Are you hiding His light behind a veil that needs to be removed? Have you allowed your light to fade by neglecting quality time with God?

Let us all put on a bright, shiny face.

The Tabernacle - Exodus 35-40

Originally Preached on 8/14/2016

“Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.” - Hebrews 8:1-2

We began our study of the exodus by exploring how God delivered His children from slavery in Egypt. After the congregation finally arrived at Mt. Sinai, the LORD started to develop and disciple them by establishing the Mosaic covenant and giving them the Law. By learning and following these commandments, the children of Israel could distinguish themselves from other peoples and eventually become the great nation of God.

Many of the ordinances and statutes that God imparted to Moses pertained specifically to the priests and their ministry in tabernacle. In order for these laws to be properly implemented as intended, the tabernacle would first need to be built and set up. Also, the priesthood itself would need to be established. Therefore God provided Moses with very specific instructions for how to construct the tabernacle and consecrate the priests who would be working there.

The tabernacle was a portable tent that Israel took with them during the exodus. Whenever the group would stop at a particular location for some period of time, they would set up the tabernacle up in the center of the camp. It was there that the congregation would worship, offer sacrifices, and commune with God. The word tabernacle means “tent”, “sanctuary”, or “place of meeting”. For those of us here today, we are currently seated in our modern equivalent of the tabernacle.

For the past several weeks, our sermons have focused upon Moses’ ongoing conversation with the LORD as he ascended and descended Mt. Sinai on at least eight separate occasions. This week we will cover the final six chapters in the book of Exodus which deal specifically with the origin of the tabernacle. Different estimates have been given that suggest it took somewhere between six to nine months to complete the tabernacle.

I. THE COLLECTION (Exodus 35:4-5a,20-21,29; 36:6-7)

Moses took up an offering from among the congregation in order to accumulate the necessary resources to build the tabernacle, all of its furniture and articles, and the priestly garments. The people generously gave precious metals and gems, fine linens and materials, dyed hairs and skins, wood, oil, spices, and incense. All of these gifts were used in various ways to assemble the tabernacle.

This collection was completely voluntary. No one was compelled or forced to contribute anything to it. Only those whose “hearts were stirred” or whose “spirits moved them” gave to the cause. You might think that the people would be hesitant to give, or that it might take a long time gather enough supplies

to finish the job. Not so. On the contrary, the children of Israel contributed so abundantly that Moses actually had to ask them to stop giving because they had gathered more than enough. Wouldn't that be a nice problem to have?

II. THE CRAFTSMEN (Exodus 35:10,30-31,34-35a; 36:1-2)

Moses employed the most skillful men available to build the tabernacle. The two chief designers and architects of the project were Bezalel and Oholiab. Under the leadership and direction of these two men, all of the various pieces that would eventually comprise the finished tabernacle were carefully crafted. Each was made in strict accordance with the specifications that God had given to Moses on Mt. Sinai (see chapters 25-31). Furthermore, each item was a work of art in its own right. These craftsmen were not mere laborers, but were truly artists of the highest degree,

III. THE CONSTRUCTION (Exodus 35:11-18)

The tabernacle's various parts were each made separately and then assembled after all of them were completed. These pieces included the curtains, coverings, boards, screens, and veil that formed the structure of the tabernacle. They also included the altar of sacrifice, the laver, the lampstand, the table of showbread, the altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant which were located inside the tabernacle.

1. (Ex. 36:8-38; 38:9-20) Curtains formed the outer wall of the tabernacle. These curtains were about 7 feet tall and hung on pillars that were staked in the ground. They were to be set up in a rectangular shape that measured 150' by 75'. On the eastern wall was a large screen that served as the entrance into the courtyard. Inside the compound stood the tabernacle itself. Its walls were made of acacia wood overlaid in gold. The structure was also rectangular measuring 45' by 15' and was draped with 4 separate coverings which formed a thick roof. The inside of the tabernacle was divided into 2 rooms which were separated by an immaculate veil.
2. (Ex. 37:1-9) The ark of the covenant was made of acacia wood and covered in pure gold inside and out. It was a rectangular box that measured 3¾' by 2¼'. The lid of the ark, which is called the mercy seat, was also crafted from gold. On it were 2 angels (cherubim) facing each other, their wings spread out as a covering over the mercy seat. Poles extended out from each side of the ark which made easier to transport.
3. (Ex. 37:10-16) The table of showbread was also made of acacia wood and covered in gold. Its surface was 3' by 1½' and it stood only 2 ¼' tall. It too had poles that were used to carry it. Various golden utensils, dishes, pans, bowls, and jars was made it be used in conjunction with the table.
4. (Ex. 37:17-24) The lampstand was handmade out of pure gold. It had a center shaft with 3 branches on each side, making a total of 7 prongs altogether. The branches had almond

blossoms designs. Atop the prongs were seven lamps which held both olive oil and wicks. Snuffers used to extinguish the lamps and trays were also made and used along with the lampstand.

5. (Ex 37:25-29) The altar of incense was made of acacia wood that was covered in gold. It stood 3' high and measured 1½' square. A horn protruded out from each corner. Poles were used to lift and carry this piece of furniture. Anointing oils and fragrant perfumes were made to be used with the altar of incense.
6. (Ex. 38:1-7) The altar of burnt offering or sacrifice was made of acacia wood and covered in bronze. Its length and width were 7 ½' square, and its height 4½'. It had 4 horns, one on each corner, and a bronze grate upon which the sacrifice could be burned. Like several of the other pieces, it had poles which were used to move it. Several bronze utensils including flesh hooks, firepans, pails, shovels, and basins were used with it as well.
7. (Ex. 38:8) The laver was made entirely of bronze. It must have been shiny and reflective because it was made of the same material that was used to make women's mirrors. Exact measurements are not given, but it was a large bowl or basin that was to be filled with water.

IV. THE COST (Exodus 38:21-31)

Ithamar, one of Aaron's sons, was charged with numbering all of the articles of tabernacle. In other words, he took an inventory of all of the items that had been built. According to him, over 2000 lbs. of gold and almost 7,500 lbs. of silver were used in the construction of the tabernacle. In addition to this, many other materials - such as bronze, wood, cloth, and do on - were used. A recent estimate puts the total value of the tabernacle in today's money at well over \$60,000,000.

V. THE CLOTHING (Exodus 39:1-31)

Aaron and his sons were chosen by God to serve as the priests. Special clothing was made for them to wear while ministering in the tabernacle. Their attire consisted of linen undergarments, a robe, an ephod with shoulder pieces, a breastplate, a sash, and a turban. The breastplate had 12 different precious stones on it, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. The garments were made with beautiful colored fabrics and included threads of gold.

VI. THE COMPLETION (Exodus 39:32,43; 40:17,34)

After several months of work, all of the items of the tabernacle were completed and brought to Moses for his approval. Finally, under his direction, the tabernacle was set up for the first time. This took place on the first day of the first month of the second year, not quite one full year after the Hebrews had originally departed from Egypt. Each item was placed inside the tabernacle in its specific place just as God had directed. Then a cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the LORD filled the

tabernacle. God's manifest presence took up residence within it.

CONCLUSION

Many Christians find the details of the tabernacle to be dry, mundane, and boring. Perhaps some of you here this morning have struggled to stay awake during this sermon. Yet the Bible dedicates almost 50 chapters to this topic. Why would God's Word include this much content, more than many other subjects, if the tabernacle was unimportant? It wouldn't! Obviously, the tabernacle holds great significance for us today. But why and how?

Perhaps more than any other Old Testament item, the tabernacle prophesies of and foreshadows the coming of the Messiah. When we understand the rich meaning of the tabernacle, we can accurately identify Jesus Christ as the one to whom it pointed. Consider the following truths...

The brazen altar spoke of our need for a sacrifice that would make atonement for our sins.
The bronze laver spoke of our need for purity in order to approach the holy God.
The golden lampstand spoke of a light which would illuminate and expose our sinfulness.
The table of showbread spoke of God's provision and desire to maintain fellowship with us.
The altar of incense spoke of the intercessory prayers that would be offered on our behalf.
The ark of the covenant and mercy seat spoke to the manifest presence of God and his kingship.
The veil spoke to our separation from God as the result of our sin.

All of these prophetic meanings (and many others) were accomplished, fulfilled, or otherwise resolved in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus often identified himself with titles that can be related to the tabernacle such as the Lamb of God, the Light of the World, the Living Water, the Bread of Life, and the King of kings. The bottom line is this - the tabernacle of Moses was a declaration of the coming Messiah - our precious Lord Jesus.

An Anniversary to Remember - Numbers 3-9

Originally Preached on 8/21/2016

"I shall remember the deeds of the Lord; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old." - Psalm 77:11

In our current sermon series "The Wandering Church" we have been studying the historical narrative of Israel's exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. Last Sunday we finished the book of Exodus and this morning we'll begin in Numbers. These books, both written by Moses, tell the entire story of this epic adventure in two parts. In the Biblical sequence however, the book of Leviticus falls in between Exodus and Numbers. We are going to skip over it for the purposes of this series because Leviticus does not emphasize historical content. Rather it is primarily a legal book that lists the numerous laws, ordinances, and statutes that were given to Moses by God while the people were stationed at Mt. Sinai.

In the last chapter of Exodus, the people set up the newly built tabernacle and the glory of God filled it. This took place on "the first day of the first month". Chapter 1 of Numbers opens a full month later, on "the first day of the second month". However, the events of chapter 7 take place on the exact same day that the tabernacle was erected. Thus, we can deduce that these first few chapters are not written in chronological order. As a matter of fact, it is likely that some of the details described in the early chapters of Numbers refer back to episodes that actually occurred a few months before.

The message this morning will briefly touch on several topics leading up to and including Israel's first Passover celebration which took place exactly one year after they departed from Egypt. We will talk about the role of the Levites, touch on a few additional laws, explore the dedication of the tabernacle, and discover how the people observed their first Passover together. This was certainly an anniversary to remember!

I. THE ROLE OF THE LEVITES (Numbers 3-4)

Several months earlier, back when Moses was still meeting with God on top of Mt. Sinai, the LORD had chosen Aaron, his sons, and their descendants to serve as the priesthood. Aaron had 4 sons. The oldest 2 boys, Nadab and Abihu, had been part of a troop that accompanied Moses up Mt. Sinai to see God. Sadly, Nadab and Abihu flippantly violated the commands of God relating to the proper offering of fire and incense (see Leviticus 10). The LORD killed them for their gross misconduct. This left only Aaron's 2 younger sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, to serve with him as priests.

Just as a pastor needs help running a church, so also these priests would need assistance to operate the tabernacle. Rather than appointing the firstborn sons of every family in every tribe to minister in the tabernacle, God instead selected the entire tribe of Levi (all of their sons) to handle this role. By making this substitution, the LORD redeemed the firstborn in exchange for the Levites. Now that the tabernacle had been completed and set up, Moses numbered these Levites at 22,000 men and called them all into service.

The Levites consisted of 3 major branches, named after Levi's 3 sons - the Kohathites, the Gershonites, and the Merarites. Each of the groups was tasked with specific duties relating to the tabernacle and its service. The Kohathites were responsible for the furnishings and holy objects located inside the tabernacle. The Gershonites were responsible for all of the cloth items such as the curtains, veils, coverings, and screens that made up the tabernacle. The Merarites were responsible for all of the solid items such as the boards, columns, pillars, sockets, cords, and pegs which formed the framework of the tabernacle. All of the Levites served under the supervision and direction of the priests.

II. SOME ADDITIONAL LAWS (Numbers 5-6)

Though Leviticus is considered the preeminent book of God's Law, we do find some of His commands scattered throughout the pages of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In chapters 5 & 6, Moses mentions a few of these. The children of Israel were to send certain categories of unclean people out of the camp so as not to defile it. They were to follow specific instructions regarding guilt and restitution. A procedure was prescribed for dealing with adultery within the marriage relationship. Rules applying to those taking a Nazirite vow were given. Finally, God provided a formal benediction to be recited by the priests when blessing the people.

III. DEDICATING THE TABERNACLE (Numbers 7)

The two preceding points in today's message flash back to events that had already taken place. They help provide context for what was happening in chapter 7. Once again, we are returned to the day that the tabernacle was first set up - and the story resumes. Moses anointed and consecrated the sanctuary and all of its furnishings, its altar, and its utensils. Then, one by one, the leaders of each of the 12 tribes of Israel brought dedication offerings to the tabernacle. One tribal offering was given each day for 12 consecutive days. The order of these offerings was as follows - Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

IV. PREPARING THE LEVITES (Numbers 8)

Aaron, the high priest, entered the tabernacle and placed the lamps on the golden lampstand. These provided light inside the Holy Place. Then he oversaw the cleansing, presentation, and ordination of the Levites. This ceremony formally qualified them to serve as assistants to the priests in the tabernacle. Moses briefly digressed once again to go over the issue of retirement for the Levites. Here is the summation of it all - now that its construction and assembly were fully complete and all of its workers (the priests and Levites) were in their appointed place, the operation of the tabernacle could finally begin.

V. CELEBRATING THE PASSOVER (Numbers 9)

Only 2 weeks after the tabernacle's completion, on the fourteenth day of the first month, the people

were commanded by God to celebrate the Passover. Exactly one year earlier the death angel had passed through Egypt, sparing only those firstborn sons whose doorposts were covered in blood. This pinnacle event had finally prompted Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go. It was this special date that marked the one year anniversary of the exodus.

There were some men who had been declared unclean according to the laws given back in chapter 5. Though they wanted to celebrate the Passover with the rest of the congregation, the law of cleanliness prevented them from doing so. They were conflicted because either choice (to celebrate or not) would involve disobedience. Moses sympathized with their predicament and approached God on their behalf. The LORD told Moses that these men, along with certain others, should celebrate the Passover on an alternate date one month later.

CONCLUSION

The joyful celebration of the Passover marked the climax of Israel's stay at Mt. Sinai. This phase of the exodus adventure was nearing an end. Soon the congregation would be on the move again, leaving the Wilderness of Sinai far behind. God had spent almost a full year preparing His covenant people for the next chapter in their journey - and now they were finally ready (or at least as ready as they could be).

Perhaps one of the best ways to perpetuate and strengthen our faith is to remember all that God has done for us in the past. We tend to forget how faithful the LORD has been to us over the years. As a result, we needlessly worry and fret over the issues of life. Just as the LORD has delivered us in the past, we can trust that He will continue to do so in the future. By celebrating historic events such as the Passover, we acknowledge God's faithfulness to us.

While Christians do not recognize the Passover per se, we do celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe that the Messiah was crucified on the day of Passover as our sacrificial lamb. In that sense, we continue the memorial tradition that began at the foot of Mt. Sinai almost 3,500 years ago.

Goodbye, Sinai - Numbers 1-2, 10-12

Originally Preached on 8/28/2016

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” - Matthew 28:19-20

The children of Israel observed Passover for the first time while camped at Mt. Sinai. Following this wonderful celebration, the people’s attention changed. In the months preceding this event, their primary focus had been on constructing the tabernacle. But now that the tabernacle was complete and Passover had passed, the principal concern of the camp shifted to something new.

After having stayed at Mt. Sinai for just over a year, the people of God were about to break camp and resume their journey. It was finally time to claim and occupy the Promised Land that the LORD had promised to them. And thus, the assembly began to make preparations for the upcoming trip. It had been several months since they’d last travelled anywhere, and many had grown somewhat comfortable with their home in the wilderness of Sinai.

Today’s message is titled “Goodbye, Sinai” and it has 3 major points of emphasis. First, we will study what happened in the weeks just prior to Israel’s departure from the mountain of God. Second, we will discuss the detailed manner in which they departed. Third, we will learn what took place in the days just after they departed.

I. THE FIRST CENSUS (Numbers 1-2)

Two weeks after the Passover, on the “first day of the second month” the LORD commanded Moses to determine the size and strength of his army. Their next major task would be to invade the hostile land of Canaan, which would require significant military action. Following God’s directive, Moses took a census of the people. All men from ages 20 and above who were fit enough to serve as soldiers were included in the count. Individual leaders from each of the 12 tribes were also designated to serve with Moses.

The results of the census are listed in Numbers chapter 1. The total number of warriors counted from the entire camp was 603,550, a sum that combines subtotals of each of the 12 tribes. Notably, the tribe of Levi is not included in this number because they were exempt from military service. As we learned earlier in this series, the Levites had been designated by God to serve alongside the priests in the tabernacle. Interestingly, the inclusion of this census and of a second one conducted later on in chapter 26 are the reason why we title this book “Numbers”.

In addition to evaluating the size of his army, Moses also received specific instructions for the arrangement of their camp. The tabernacle was to be set up in the center with the Levites and priests stationed around it. The 12 tribes of Israel were to encircle them on the north, south, east, and west.

Therefore, they were divided into 4 groups. To the east was the camp of Judah, which also included the tribes of Zebulun and Issachar. To the south was the camp of Reuben, which also included the tribes of Simeon and Gad. To the west was the camp of Ephraim, which also included the tribes of Manasseh and Benjamin. To the north was the camp of Dan, which also included the tribes of Naphtali and Asher.

While each tribe had their own individual banner, each of these 4 larger divisions also had a standard for their group. According to ancient Jewish tradition, the standard of Judah bore the image of a lion, the standard of Reuben bore the image of a man, the standard of Ephraim bore the image of an ox, and the standard of Dan bore the image of an eagle. These are identical to the 4 living creatures that surround God in the apocalyptic visions of Ezekiel and Revelation.

II. THE PEOPLE DEPART (Numbers 9-10)

God further instructed Moses to make 2 silver trumpets. These would be used for various purposes, such as to convene meetings or to break camp. Differing signals were established. Some were designed as alarms for combat situations and others were blasts of joy when observing festivals and feasts. These trumpets would be used in a variety of situations by the children of Israel.

The cloud of God had resided over the tabernacle for many months. Finally, on the 20th day of the second month, the cloud lifted and began to move. Moses sounded the trumpet, and the children of Israel set out from Mt. Sinai. Just as they had done previously, these pilgrims followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. They marched in a particular order, with the camp of Judah leading and the camp of Dan at the rear.

Before saying goodbye to Sinai Moses asked his brother-in-law Hobab, Zipporah's brother, to join him on their journey to the Promised Land. When Hobab refused, Moses pleaded with him to reconsider. Though nothing else is stated explicitly in this passage, a later reference found in Judges 1:16 suggests that the descendants of Hobab resided in Israel along with the children of God. It is reasonable to believe that Hobab changed his mind and ultimately decided to accompany Moses and the Hebrews to Canaan.

With the Ark of Covenant going ahead of them signifying the presence of God, the children of Israel journeyed northward. They would make a few stops - at Taberah, at Kibroth-hattaavah, and at Hazeroth - before eventually coming to a stop and setting up camp somewhere in the wilderness of Paran.

III. MORE COMPLAINTS (Numbers 11-12)

Almost immediately, the people began to complain again. God became angry and sent fire which consumed some folks on the outskirts of the camp. Though Moses prayed and the fire was extinguished, the complaints persisted. The people were displeased with the manna which the LORD was providing daily. They demanded meat to fill their raging appetites. Moses did not know how to satisfy them and was heavily burdened. God told him to select 70 men from among the camp to help share this load.

Following this, God sent a wind from the sea which blew in literally millions of quail. These fell to the ground covering an estimated area of almost 20 square miles. The birds were piled up 3 feet deep. There was enough quail for Israel to eat meat for an entire month. They people went out and gathered quail for a full day and a half. Seeing their greed, the LORD sent a severe plague on the camp and many people were killed.

Even Moses' brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam began to complain. They murmured about Moses' wife because she was a Cushite (she was born in Ethiopia and almost certainly a black woman). They also pridefully complained that Moses should not be considered to be the only leader - after all, God had spoken through them too. In response to their grumblings, God summoned the 3 siblings to the tent of meeting. There He rebuked Miriam and Aaron, and caused Miriam to become leprous. Subsequently, she was put out of the camp for 7 days. When she returned, the people of God continued onward to Kadesh.

CONCLUSION

The children of Israel were comfortable at Mt. Sinai. They had become content just living there. After a while, they even developed daily routines and practices. It was a safe place where God spoke with them regularly, and helped them to grow and develop in their faith. While they camped at Mt. Sinai, the congregation had little interaction with other people or groups. They did not have to engage with the world around them. They made preparations to carry out God's calling, but they never actually had to do it. Life was simple and relatively stress-free.

In the same way, many contemporary Christians and churches are resistant to move out of their comfort zones. Some have dwelt at their own personal Mt. Sinai for years, stubbornly refusing to leave. They enjoy the easy lifestyle of coming to church, learning about the LORD, and worshiping with their fellow believers. But many have no real interest in carrying the message of Jesus to the lost, because doing so would require them to move. Some believers spend their entire lives preparing for something that they never actually do.

Here is the plain truth... God has not called His people to stay, but rather to go. While there will certainly be quiet seasons of life in which God is discipling us and equipping us to accomplish His will, these are but temporary. At some point beloved, we have to move. God has called us to reach this world for Christ, to carry the light of the gospel to dark places, and to confront the enemy in the powerful name of Jesus Christ. This can't be done sitting in our "safe place".

Whether we are moving literally or figuratively, either way can be hard. It exposes us to new pressures, problems, and worries. It often leads to complaining, grumbling, and doubt. Even still, moving is what God has called us to do. Perhaps this morning it is time for you individually - and for us collectively - to leave these comfort zones behind, to heed His voice, and to say "Goodbye, Sinai!"

A Fateful Decision - Numbers 13-14

Originally Preached on 9/4/2016

“Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord - for we walk by faith, not by sight - we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” - 2 Corinthians 5:6-8

For the past few months we have been reviewing the history of the exodus in our current sermon series titled “The Wandering Church”. We have seen how God delivered His children from bondage in Egypt and promised to give them a land of their own. We have studied how the LORD developed and disciplined His children at Mt. Sinai so that they could rightly live in their new home when the time came. Now He has finally led them to the very edge of Canaan, so that the conquest and occupation of this promised land can begin.

The Scriptures are clear that it was God’s will and desire for Israel to invade and claim Canaan. God promised to drive out the pagan inhabitants living there so that His children could settle in their place. He ensured the Hebrews that He’d fight on their behalf and give them the victory. The LORD Himself personally gifted this land to the descendants of Jacob and defined its borders in exact detail. God had called Israel for this purpose, and the land was now theirs for the taking.

When we concluded our message last week, the congregation had settled in the Wilderness of Paran. From this strategic location, they planned to launch their attack. This morning we will explore Moses’ invasion of Canaan. Was it successful? Why or why not? How do these past events apply to Christians today? We will seek to answer these questions and more as we consider their fateful decision...

I. TWELVE SCOUTS (Numbers 13:1-24)

Before launching a full scale assault on the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to investigate the area. This tactic would provide them with vital information about the size, strength, and location of their enemy. By sending a small group of spies into Canaan, the children of Israel could develop a more effective battle plan. Also, they could confirm that this was truly a lush and fertile place just as God had promised.

Therefore Moses selected 12 men - one from each of the tribes - to serve as scouts. Among them were Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim, and Caleb, from the tribe of Judah. Joshua was a dear companion of Moses who served as the military general of Israel. These dozen spies crept into the Promised Land and secretly explored it for 40 days, while Moses and the rest of the people remained in the region of Kadesh anxiously awaiting their return.

While gone, the scouts journeyed through or to the Wilderness of Zin, the Negev desert, the hill country of Canaan, the large city of Hebron, and the Valley of Eshcol. While in the valley, they cut down a large cluster of grapes to take back with them. As they made their circuit through the land, these 12 spies saw

many things that they'd include in their report to Moses once they arrived safely back at camp.

II. TEN DOUBTS (Numbers 13:25-33; 14:1-38)

Almost a month and a half after being dispatched, the scouts finally returned. They spoke of a beautiful land that did indeed "flow with milk and honey", just as God had promised. By they also worried because the people they'd seen living there were strong, the cities were fortified, and that the descendants of Anak (giants) were there. The spies had encountered several hostile and formidable groups including the Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Canaanites.

Having observed all of these obstacles first hand, the majority opinion of the spies was not to invade Canaan. 10 of them concluded that the enemy was just too powerful, and that any attempt to attack would most certainly fail. Only 2 of them - Joshua and Caleb - trusted that God would deliver on His promises to Israel. They urged the people to obey the calling of God, and to invade the Promised Land as the LORD had directed. But the children of Israel rejected their pleas, were overwhelmed with fear and doubt, and chose not to strike.

Their decision was a direct violation of God's expressed will. It demonstrated their lack of faith in Him. Not surprisingly, the LORD became quite upset because of His children's rebellion. Again Moses lovingly intervened on behalf of Israel, but their disobedience was all but indefensible. God decreed a harsh punishment upon them - all of the people ages 20 and up, who had been included in the first census, would not enter the Promised Land. Instead they would wander in the wilderness for 40 years until all of them had died. Only Joshua and Caleb would be spared. The 10 scouts who led the camp astray all died by plague before the LORD.

The occupation of Canaan had been placed on hold. Because of Israel's disobedience, God would now wait patiently for the next generation to arise. Perhaps someday they would fulfill their destiny, since their parents had failed to do so.

III. ONE ROUT (Numbers 14:39-45)

When the people realized their mistake, they mourned and sought to make it right. Thus, they came to Moses and told him that they'd changed their minds - they would attack Canaan after all. Upon hearing this, Moses warned them not to proceed. He knew that God's power and presence had been withdrawn because of the people's sin, and that any attempt to invade now would yield catastrophic results with many casualties.

But the people ignored Moses advice, and went up without him or the Ark of the Covenant. In other words, they advanced without the presence and blessing of God and without their leader. The Amalekites and Canaanites met their assault and drove them back as far as Hormah. Many Israelites fell. The invasion of the Promised Land had officially failed. Now the Hebrews were resigned to wander aimlessly in the wilderness without a homeland for the next 40 years.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude our study of the exodus today, there are three major points of application that I'd like to point out...

The first might strike some of you as controversial. Here it is... making decisions based upon majority vote is not always the best manner to discern God's will. Joshua and Caleb were outvoted 10 to 2, but they were still right. Over the years I have seen many churches make decisions based more upon majority opinion rather than upon God's clearly expressed will. Seeing the average maturity of most Christians, is it any surprise that often times the majority chooses to act contrary to the LORD's desire? While the perspective of every member should be considered, church pastors and leaders should lovingly lead their flocks to follow the direction of God regardless of popular opinion.

The second lesson is this - some opportunities only come around once. The children of Israel were given one chance to invade Canaan with God's blessing, but they declined. When they attempted to attack later on, it was too late and they utterly failed. The same is true for us - sometimes we have only one opportunity to answer God's calling in a particular situation. If we allow that moment to pass, the window may forever close. While the LORD is always willing to forgive us of our sin, He does not guarantee us that we will be given second chances to seize missed opportunities.

This third and final application is the main point of my message this morning. We must make our decisions based upon faith, and not succumb to fear. Far too many Christians and churches see the obstacles before them only in humanistic terms. They cower in worry and in doubt. They walk by sight, rather than by faith. As such, they never reach the places that God has called them to. I am fully convinced that there are hundreds (if not thousands) of congregations in existence today that are wandering aimlessly in their own wildernesses, suffering the consequence of their own disobedience, biding their time year after year as members slowly die off one by one.

Our decisions, or lack thereof, have consequences. So... are you one that walks by faith, or are you one that walks by sight?

Wandering in the Wilderness - Numbers 16-17

Originally Preached on 9/11/2016

“But these men [false teachers] revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.” - Jude 1:10-11

The children of Israel blatantly disobeyed God by refusing to conquer Canaan. In response to their reluctance, the LORD sentenced them to wander about in the desert wilderness for 40 years. During this period, all of the adults who were ages 20 and above at the time of the decision not to invade the Promised Land would die. Only the young, who were not responsible for this sin, would be spared. They would grow up to replace their unfaithful parents and grandparents as the next generation of Israel.

The Bible does not speak much about the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. We have already read and studied an extensive amount of information about the first few years of the exodus. In the latter chapters of Numbers and in parts of Deuteronomy we will find a fair amount of content on the final years of the exodus. But these 4 long decades in between - which can be called “the wilderness years” - are covered in just 5 chapters from Numbers 15-19.

There are several laws, ordinances, and duties listed and described in these few chapters. The topics addressed include making proper offerings, keeping the Sabbath, additional procedures for Levites and priests, the special ordinance of the red heifer, and more rules regarding spiritual cleanliness. While all of this information is certainly valuable, it does not contribute greatly to the narrative story of the exodus itself.

This sermon series is focused on presenting the chronological history of the exodus - not so much about expounding on the laws of God or teachings of Moses. This being the case, there are really only 2 chapters in the book of Numbers that describe actual events that took place during the 40 years of punishment. We will examine them in today’s message which I’ve titled “Wandering in the Wilderness”.

I. KORAH’S REBELLION (Numbers 16:1-40)

The children of God had been wandering in the wilderness for some time prior to the events described in this chapter, but we can’t say for sure how long. A large number of people in the camp had grown dissatisfied with the leadership of Moses and Aaron. One of the prominent Levites, a man named Korah, conspired with 3 friends from the tribe of Reuben to start an uprising. These men believed that they could lead the camp more effectively than Moses and Aaron. In addition to them, 250 renowned leaders of Israel joined Korah’s cause and openly challenged Moses and Aaron’s authority.

Moses instructed these 250 men to assemble at the tabernacle. They were each to bring a pan of fire

and burn incense before the LORD. He told them that God would choose from among them who were truly “holy”. Moses also expressed great disappointment with Korah and the other Levites who had joined the rebellion. God had set them apart to serve as special ministers in the tabernacle, yet this was not enough - they wanted to be priests with Aaron instead.

Moses also summoned the insurgent Reubenites to the tabernacle, but they refused to come. Meanwhile God’s anger burned against all of those who had risen up against Him. Moses warned the congregation to back away from the tents of Korah and his co-conspirators. Suddenly, the earth opened up and swallowed the rebels, their families, and all of their possessions. It then closed over the top of them, and all of the traitors perished. At that same instant, fire poured down from heaven killing Korah and the 250 men who stood with him at the tabernacle. Later, the fire pans of those who had died were used to make a covering for the altar.

God brought Korah’s Rebellion to a sudden and tragic end. In the end, hundreds of people died. Sadly, this revolt had been led by a respected Levite who had grown jealous of Moses and Aaron. In the modern church, this would be similar to a disgruntled deacon or elder rising up to defy the godly leadership of his pastor. If the pastor is truly called by God (and I concede that not all are), then rebellion against him is an affront to God himself. The strife and division caused by such an uprising can have lasting repercussions on and in the church.

II. DEVASTATING PLAGUE (Numbers 16:41-50)

By squelching the rebellion, God clearly affirmed that Moses and Aaron were His chosen leaders. Still, many of the Israelites remained frustrated and upset. They came forward accusing Moses and Aaron of causing the death of Korah and his companions. Again God became furious with their continued murmuring, and intended to wipe out the entire congregation. He sent a severe and devastating plague into the camp.

Moses acted quickly to save his people. He sent Aaron into the midst of the assembly with a fire pan of burning incense. Aaron hastily ran, seeking atonement for those who had offended God. Because of Moses’ and Aaron’s quick response the plague was checked and did not spread any further. Still, some 14,700 people died as a result of the outbreak. These deaths were in addition to those who had died in the initial rebellion...

III. AARON’S BUDDING ROD (Numbers 17:1-13)

Though almost 15,000 people had died as a result of their uprising, doubts about Moses and Aaron still lingered. Wanting to put an end to them once and for all, Moses asked the leaders from each of the 12 tribes to bring a rod to the tabernacle. In addition to these, Aaron was asked to bring his rod also. All 13 rods were then placed in the tabernacle before LORD. Moses told the tribal leaders that God would cause His chosen man’s rod to sprout. They were left in the sanctuary overnight.

The next morning, Moses brought the rods out. Aaron's had budded, bringing forth buds, blossoms, and ripe almonds. Clearly God had chosen Aaron to serve as the high priest of Israel. God told Moses to place Aaron's budded rod before the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle as a sign against the rebels. In the New Testament book of Hebrews (chapter 9, verse 4) we read that this rod was eventually placed inside the Ark along with the 10 commandments and a golden jar of manna.

CONCLUSION

Historians says that the people wandered in the wilderness for 38 years, yet the story of Korah's Rebellion, the plague, and Aaron's budding rod are the only events recorded during this entire time period. Surely more than this must have happened, yet we have no record of it. Why are all of these years left out? Many theologians have put forth different theories. I want to suggest that the absence of information is intentional and speaks volumes...

The fact that so little is written about the wilderness wanderings indicates that nothing of eternal significance took place during these years. The people were weighed down by the burden of God's punishment. Because of their disobedience they had lost their power, their influence, their reputation, and their hope. They had become miserable and pitiful. The account of Korah's Rebellion is all that we really need to adequately describe the wilderness years. It was a long season of jealousy, rebellion, mourning, and death.

Finally, in the first verse of chapter 20, Scripture states that the surviving children of Israel returned to Kadesh. Isn't it interesting that this was the exact same location where the wilderness wanderings began? They had aimlessly roamed around in the desert for almost 40 years only to end up right back where they started! In other words, they had traveled in circles for decades yet never really went anywhere. Could this be a picture of some of us today?

I have witnessed firsthand the misery of many who have chosen to live their lives in disobedience to and in rebellion against God. They have invoked His terrible wrath. They spend their days wandering about in the wilderness. They brazenly question God's authority and challenge those whom He has chosen. They openly defy and rebuke the LORD. May God have mercy on these insurrectionists.

Two Strikes, You're Out - Numbers 20

Originally Preached on 9/18/2016

"But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?... But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds... For there is no partiality with God." - Romans 2:3, 5-6, 11

I hope that you've been enjoying our sermon series called "The Wandering Church". Over the years we've all heard many of the well-known stories that took place in the life of Moses and during the exodus. In this collection of messages, we've been streaming them all together in their proper chronological order. Connecting these separate events with one another in a sequence has given me a fuller, richer appreciation of the entire exodus journey. I trust that it has done the same for you.

Last week's sermon was difficult to preach and probably hard to hear. The children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. During this time, Moses watched as literally millions of his followers died. God had decreed that every one of them age 20 and above would die, except Joshua and Caleb, for their sinful decision at Kadesh-barnea. The people were rebellious, covetous, and desperate. They had lost their purpose, their strength, and their hope.

After roaming about in the desert for 4 decades, the children of God arrived again at Kadesh. By now, most of the older adults had died. Almost the entire population was now younger than 60 years of age. Those who had been children and teens before the wilderness wanderings began had grown into adulthood, and now had families of their own. Only a small number of the "old-timers" were still living. Three of these remaining elders were Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were siblings. Miriam was present years earlier when the Egyptian princess found the baby Moses in a basket along the Nile River. Aaron had been chosen by God and served with Moses as the co-leader of the exodus. Although they had their occasional squabbles, these three were family and loved each other dearly. Though they were all prominent people, none of them were exempted from God's judgment. They too would die before entering the Promised Land, just as most of the others of their generation had already done.

In this morning's message, we will study about the death of both Miriam and Aaron. We will also be told of Moses' upcoming fate. Once again, this is not a particularly cheerful or upbeat message. Still, I believe that there are important truths to be learned from this text.

I. MIRIAM DIES (Numbers 20:1-2)

The mention of Miriam's death and burial is brief and without much detail. There is no indication that

the congregation expressed a great outpouring of mourning or grief. Certainly they were deeply saddened by her passing, yet probably not overly surprised by it. Miriam was older than both Moses and Aaron. Bible scholars estimate that she was almost 126 years old when she died. They reason that she'd probably been sickly for some time, and so her death did not come as a shock to anyone. She died and was buried in Kadesh.

Jewish tradition links Miriam's death with the sudden lack of water. Some translations of the original manuscripts read that "Miriam died there and was buried there, and the congregation was without water." Their belief is that a well (called Miriam's Well) supernaturally followed the children of Israel during the wilderness wanderings supplying them with ample water. God made this miraculous provision for the people because of the virtue and merit of Miriam. When she died, this traveling well dried up leaving the people without. While this is an interesting theory, there is no Biblical basis for it in my opinion..

II. MOSES DISOBEYS (Numbers 20:2-13)

Following the death of Miriam, Israel faced a water shortage. They came to Moses and Aaron to complain. As he'd done numerous times before, Moses turned to the LORD for help. God told Moses to "speak" to the rock at Meribah. When he did so, water would pour out from it for the people and their livestock to drink. So Moses gathered the congregation together, but rather than speaking to the rock as God had commanded he struck the rock twice with his rod. Water followed out as the LORD had promised, but Moses had disobeyed God's clear instructions.

Immediately before striking the rock Moses said, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" This question seems to suggest that he was extremely frustrated with his followers. Perhaps his anger got the best of him, as it had on previous occasions, so he hit the rock in disgust. Notice that he did not ascribe the miracle to God either, but rather to himself and Aaron. For whatever reason, Moses disobeyed God.

In response to Moses' brash behavior, the LORD told him that he would not be permitted to enter into the Promised Land either. To be honest, this has always story has always bothered me a little bit. Why would God restrict Moses, the very man He'd called to lead the exodus, from reaching his goal? Of course he had his faults and made some mistakes, but wasn't the LORD being overly harsh? I mean, this is Moses we're talking about. Considering all he'd done and put up with, surely he deserved to enter the Promised Land...

Aaron's oldest sons were killed because they offered a profane sacrifice before the LORD. Fire and plague had killed many of the pilgrims because of their doubts and grumblings. The earth had opened and swallowed hundreds of rebels in the wilderness. Millions had died as a direct result of God's punishment. Throughout other places in Scripture, we read about many people who were cursed or even killed by God. Though we may think that His actions are cruel and unfair, we are not in a position to judge. What would be unfair is if the LORD judged people differently by showing leniency toward

some and not others. A fair judge is an impartial judge. That said, Moses faced the same level of scrutiny as anyone else. He was held to the same standard.

III. AARON DIES (Numbers 20:14-29)

The wilderness wanderings had finally ended, and now Moses intended to lead Israel northward to the region east of the Jordan River. The direct route would require them to pass through the land of Edom. Moses sent messengers to the king asking for permission to pass safely through his country. When the king refused, Moses had no choice but to go around. So the people journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mt. Hor.

Following the LORD's command, Moses took Aaron and Eleazar with him up Mt. Hor. While on the mountain, Moses stripped Aaron of his priestly garments and placed them on Eleazar. This ceremony formally transferred the office of High Priest from Aaron to his son Eleazar. Once this had taken place, Scripture states that Aaron died on the mountain top. When Moses and Eleazar came back down the mountain the congregation was surprised and devastated by the news of Aaron's passing. They mourned his death for 30 days.

Some critics cite Aaron's death as a contradiction in the Bible. The book of Numbers twice states that he died atop Mt. Hor, but in Deuteronomy 10:6 we read that Aaron died at Moserah and was buried there. So which is it? The precise location of these two places is unknown, but Bible apologists explain that Mt. Hor lies in the region of Moserah. Therefore, both of these statements are true and there is no conflict whatsoever.

CONCLUSION

Within the span of only a few months, Moses lost both his brother and his sister. Their deaths must have affected him, just as they would anyone of us. Though he was still surrounded by many godly men such as Joshua, it must have been difficult to watch his siblings die.

When I think about this passage, it becomes clear that no one is exempt from God's judgment. Even the great prophet Moses - a champion of the faith - was subject to it. God doesn't measure people's deeds on a balance scale. He doesn't give us a pass if our good outweighs our bad. There is no favoritism on His part toward certain people or groups. We are all vile, wretched sinners before a holy God - even those who we naively suppose themselves to be the most righteous. This is why we all need to receive the forgiveness and salvation that Jesus offers. It is our only hope.

God would be perfectly justified to judge anyone of us at any moment to any degree that He desired. Moses was not allowed to get away with his disobedience. What makes us think that we will?

Three Kings and a Bronze Serpent - Numbers 21

Originally Preached on 9/25/2016

“For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.” - Psalm 30:5

The story of the exodus, at least so far, can be summarized as follows: God had delivered His people from Egypt. He had developed His people at Mt. Sinai. The people were disobedient to God at Kadesh. Therefore, the Lord disciplined them in the wilderness. In short, they had been delivered, developed, disobedient, and disciplined... but would they ever become dominant again?

The wilderness wanderings were a long, dark chapter in the exodus story, but they had finally come to an end. Millions had died in the wilderness, including both Miriam and Aaron. The camp had become miserable and inconsequential. It must have seemed at times that all was lost, but unbeknownst to Moses and the camp a new day was dawning...

In this morning's message, the tables finally turn for the beleaguered children of Israel. Prolonged failure suddenly gives way to success. Years of defeat are exchanged for sweeping victories. The grave despair of the past is overcome by a new hope for the future. God's promise to His children has not been forgotten. He is still able to give them their Promised Land.

I. ARAD IS CONQUERED (Numbers 21:1-3)

The children of Israel had once struck fear in the heart of their enemies, but after wandering about helplessly in the wilderness for almost 40 years their reputation had severely weakened. The emboldened king of Arad in southern Canaan decided to launch an offensive against them, perhaps hoping to drive them away from his land once and for all. This may have taken place while the camp was mourning Aaron's death at Mt. Hor. In his initial raid, the king of Arad was quite successful and took some of the Israelites as captives.

Moses and the people had been provoked. They turned to God and prayed for deliverance from and victory over these aggressive Canaanites. God heard their cries for help and quickly came to their aid. With the LORD's help, the children of Israel struck back utterly destroying the kingdom of Arad and all of its cities. This great triumph took place at Hormah.

Some 40 years earlier the Israelites had attempted to invade Canaan without God's blessing or presence, and had been driven back all the way to Hormah (Numbers 14:45). Now, all these years later, at the second battle of Hormah it was Israel that prevailed over the Canaanites. These two conflicts fittingly serve as bookends to the years of the wilderness wanderings. This was also the first of several military victories that would be enjoyed by Moses and his followers.

II. THE BRONZE SERPENT (Numbers 21:4-9)

The congregation left Mt. Hor heading southward, toward the Red Sea. However they soon turned east in order to circle around the land of Edom. This was a long, out-of-the way journey and the people became impatient. As always, they began to complain. God answered their grumblings by sending poisonous snakes into the camp. Many people were bitten and died.

Seeing what was happening, the Israelites came to Moses and pleaded with him to get rid of the snakes. The LORD instructed Moses to craft a bronze serpent and place it on a standard. He then raised the standard high in the center of the camp. Anyone who'd been bitten could come and look upon the standard and they would survive. This procedure provided a remedy until the threat subsided.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. - John 3:14-15

In the gospel of John, Jesus mentioned this event while explaining salvation to Nicodemus. Referring to Himself, Jesus stated that just as the bronze serpent was lifted up in the days of Moses so also the Son of Man would be lifted up (on the cross and/or ascended to Heaven). And like those Israelites who'd looked upon the standard and been saved from the deadly snakes, so also all who believed in the risen Christ would be saved from their sin.

III. THE AMORITES ARE DEFEATED (Numbers 21:10-32)

Israel passed through several locations on its way around Edom. When the people finally arrived at the southern border of Moab, they discovered that the area had been overrun by the Amorites. Therefore Moses requested permission from the Amorite king to pass through the occupied territory, but Sihon refused. Moses was not willing to go around another region. This time, he and the children of Israel would fight.

Unlike the nation of Edom, Israel felt no ancestral affection for or kinship to the Amorites. Furthermore, they had recently undertaken a successful military campaign against the Canaanites of Arad. They were slowly regaining the formidable swagger that they'd once held. They boldly defended themselves from an attack by Sihon and the Amorites. Scripture states that Moses severely defeated the Amorites and took possession of all the land that they held - most notably the city of Heshbon.

The assembly continued northward up the eastern side of the Jordan River and captured the cities of Jazer. They drove out all of the Amorites living in this area as well. Israel had successfully vanquished the pesky Amorites from the previously occupied areas of Moab.

IV. BASHAN IS CRUSHED (Numbers 21:33-35)

When Israel came into land of Bashan, Og the king led his armies out to meet them. This conflict took

place at Endrei. By now it was clear that God's favor had returned to Moses and his people. They completely annihilated the inhabitants of Bashan, killing them all including the king and his sons. Afterwards, Israel took possession of the entire region.

After this victory, God's people returned to Moab. In a relatively short time they had conquered much of the Transjordan region. They now occupied the area immediately east of the Sea Of Galilee, the Jordan River, and the northern Dead Sea. The reputation of Israel as a force to be reckoned with had been firmly reestablished.

CONCLUSION

The events in this chapter remind us that God's love for His children never fades. Even though we may have been through long seasons of difficulty and strife, God is still able to restore us again. Even when we have walked in hard-hearted disobedience to Him for years, still God loves us and wants to renew us once more.

In addition, the LORD's promises are never forgotten. He had vowed to bring the Hebrews into the Promised Land, and still intended to do exactly that. Sometimes Christians today doubt that God will make good on His promises to us. The answers don't seem to come as quickly as we expect or in the manner that we anticipated. Yet even in these times we can rest assured that God has not forgotten His promises and He will always keep His word.

Perhaps you have been wandering around lost and defeated for many years. Perhaps you can sense the venomous poison of sin coursing through your veins. If so, don't fret - there is good news. Salvation and victory are waiting for you just around the corner. Everything can change in an instant, just as it did for the children of Israel. Weeping may have endured for the night, but joy is coming in the morning...

God is ready to break the chains that have held you down for so long. He is eager to disperse the darkness in your life with His glorious light. Stop groveling in pity, sorrow, and despair. Turn to Jesus. Trust in His promises. Lean on His goodness. Rely on His strength. Act on His calling. Restoration is nearer than you think!

Balaam and Balak - Numbers 22-24

Originally Preached on 10/2/2016

"...forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet." - 2 Peter 2:15-16

The first generation of Israel perished in the wilderness, but the second generation recaptured the vision that their parents had lost. With renewed purpose, Moses led them around Edom and then northward through Moab. God's favor and power was with these new Israelites. They encountered and defeated several enemies as they journeyed including the Canaanite led by the king of Arad, the Amorites led by King Sihon, and the armies of Bashan led by King Og.

The children of God effectively took control of the vast area due east of the Jordan River and camped themselves in the plains of Moab. This would be the place from which they'd eventually launch their full-scale invasion of the Promised Land. In the meantime, however, their presence in his country alarmed the Moabite king Balak. Despite his deep concerns, Balak feared military confrontation with Israel. Balak needed to address the threat in another manner.

In this morning's sermon, we will read the story of Balaam and Balak. Balaam was a sorcerer who was hired by King Balak specifically to place a curse on Israel. The king hoped that this curse would weaken Moses and his followers so that they might be defeated.

I. BALAAM IS HIRED (Numbers 22:1-20)

Although the land of Midian was many miles away to the south, this passage indicates that many Midianites had migrated and settled in Moab. The Moabites and Midianites were allies with one another, and both were bothered by the arrival of Moses and his people. King Balak decided to hire Balaam, a prominent diviner from a neighboring kingdom, to come and place a curse on Israel. Perhaps then, his armies could drive these unwanted Hebrews out of Moab.

Balak sent messengers to Balaam along with a hefty payment for the services to be rendered. When these men arrived, they presented Balaam with the king's offer. Balaam asked the guests to spend the night so that he'd have time to consult with God. That night the LORD told Balaam not to go with the men and not to curse Israel. Therefore, the next morning Balaam sent the king's messengers on their way and did not return with them.

Balak was not willing to give up so easily. The king sent a second group of messengers - more prestigious than the first - back to Balaam hoping that he'd reconsider. Balaam told them that no matter how much money was offered, he simply could not speak contrary to the LORD's command. Nevertheless, he agreed to return with the men to Balak the king all the while insisting that he would only speak what

God allowed.

II. THE TALKING DONKEY (Numbers 22:21-40)

God was angry with Balaam for agreeing to go with the king's men. He had clearly instructed Balaam not to curse Israel. Although God did not prevent him for going, it was certainly displeasing to the LORD that he went. Balaam saddled his donkey and rode with the messengers back to Moab.

Along the way Balaam's donkey abruptly turned off the trail and walked into a field. Balaam redirected the donkey by striking it. Later, the beast pressed against a wall causing Balaam's foot to get smashed. He struck the donkey again in anger. After that the donkey came to a sudden stop and lay down under Balaam. Balaam was furious and hit the poor animal with his stick. Imagine his surprise when the donkey said, "Why do you keep hitting me?"

At this moment God opened Balaam's eyes and he saw the angel of the LORD standing there with a drawn sword in his hand. The angel explained that the donkey had been able to see him all the while and that is why it had been acting so strangely. As a matter of fact, by turning aside on three occasions the donkey had actually saved Balaam's life. The angel then told Balaam to continue on to Moab, careful to speak only what he was told.

III. THE FIRST BLESSING (Numbers 22:41-23:12)

After their initial meeting, Balak took Balaam up to the high places of Baal. From there they could see a large portion of the children of Israel camped at a distance. The king's men erected seven altars upon which they sacrificed burnt offerings. Following this Balaam spoke his first discourse.

King Balak was expecting Balaam to curse Israel, but instead the diviner blessed them. The king was outraged. Balaam quickly defended himself by reminding the king that he'd promised only to say what the LORD put in his mouth.

IV. THE SECOND BLESSING (Numbers 23:13-26)

Balak sought to try this process a second time. He took Balaam to another peak located in the field of Zophim. From there they could only see a small group of the Israelites. Perhaps Balaam would be able to curse them if they were fewer in number. Again, the men built seven altars and made sacrifices before Balaam spoke.

Again Balaam pronounced a blessing upon the children of Jacob. King Balak couldn't believe what was happening. He told Balaam that if he wasn't going to curse Israel than not to say anything - certainly don't bless them! Again the sorcerer answered that he'd only speak as God directed him to.

V. THE THIRD BLESSING (Numbers 23:27-24:13)

Still not willing to give up on his plan, Balak led Balaam to the top of Peor which overlooked the wilderness. Perhaps God would allow a curse to be spoken from there. They set up seven altars and made burnt offerings upon them. Balaam then spoke his third oracle.

Again Balaam pronounced a blessing upon Israel. Balak was furious. He had been betrayed. Rather than cursing Moses and his followers, Balaam had actually blessed them three times. Still Balaam defended his actions by saying that he had agreed to only speak what the LORD allowed.

VI. THE PROPHECY OF DOOM (Numbers 24:14-25)

Balaam went on to prophesy about the coming disasters of Moab, Sheth, Edom, Seir, Amalek, Kenite, Asshur, and Eber. So not only had he blessed Israel, but he also foretold how she would soon demolish her enemies. Balak's plan had completely backfired, and so he and Balaam parted ways. However, this would not be the last time that the two worked together...

CONCLUSION

When you read the eloquent prophecies of Balaam, you might think that he was a pretty good guy. After all, he repeatedly refused to curse God's children even when pressured to do so. Yet the Bible repeatedly condemns Balaam for his unrighteous actions. While Balaam said the right things outwardly, a closer look reveals his inward motivations were corrupt.

If Balaam already knew that he was not going to curse Israel, why did he continue to string Balak along as if he might? Different answers have been proposed for this question, but I tend to believe that Balaam was intentionally taking advantage of the desperate king. Make no mistake - Balaam had no particular devotion to or regard for either God or Israel, and the only reason he spoke blessings rather than curses was because he feared the angel of the LORD more than he feared the sniveling king. Balaam was in it for himself. I wonder how much compensation Balaam received before the disheartened king finally realized what was happening...

Today there are still many men and women around just like Balaam. They are often very well-known and highly respected. They too are usually dynamic leaders and eloquent speakers. Sadly, many desperate and needy people look to these charlatans as God's answer to their impassioned prayers. They send what little money they have to them and their ministries expecting to receive God's blessing, but in the end these modern-day Balaams are just playing off of their followers' grief and despair. They use the ministry and the things of God as nothing more than a means of personal gain. These false teachers love the wages of unrighteousness. Woe to the Balaams of this world! May God have mercy on their souls.

The Slaughter of Midian - Numbers 25 & 31

Originally Preached on 10/9/2016

“But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.” - Revelation 2:14

In our study last week we were introduced to a self-absorbed prophet named Balaam. He was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to place a curse upon Israel. However, God appeared to Balaam and strictly forbade him from speaking a curse upon His children. From the get-go Balaam knew that he could not do what Balak had requested, but still he took advantage of the king's desperation by stringing him along as if he might. After Balaam pronounced three blessings the frustrated king realized that he was never going to curse Israel, so the two parted ways.

But Balaam was cunning and began to consider other ways of accomplishing Balak's request. Although he could not curse Israel directly, perhaps there was another way to undermine and weaken them. If he could devise a way to do it, maybe the king would be pleased and he'd award Balaam with the generous payment after all. The crafty and corrupt prophet reasoned that he could possibly still salvage this situation and turn it into a hefty payday.

After formulating a devious plan, Balaam returned to share his scheme with King Balak. In the message this morning we will examine the events that followed. We will learn about Balaam's wicked counsel to the king, how it impacted the children of Israel, and what their ultimate response was to it.

I. ISRAEL'S IMMORALITY (Numbers 25:1-5)

Following Balaam's suggestion, King Balak sent many young Midianite women on a mission to the Hebrews' camp. These beautiful ladies were instructed to seduce the men of Israel both physically and spiritually. They successfully charmed several of Israel's leaders into worshipping a false god named Baal of Peor. God was furious with His children and sent a devastating plague among the congregation.

Under the LORD's direction, Moses instructed his judges to slay every man of Israel who had worshiped Baal. Perhaps by doing this the fierce anger of God would be appeased and the plague would be lifted. Up to this point Balaam's evil plan was working perfectly. The children of God were bringing misfortune upon themselves through their own sinful misconduct, and there is little doubt that King Balak was quite pleased by it.

Balaam could not place a curse on Israel directly, but by enticing them to commit acts of immorality and false worship he tricked God's children into bringing a curse upon themselves. This is often how the enemy works against us. When his direct assaults fail, he turns to more subtle and indirect techniques. By appealing to our own carnal lusts and temptations, the Devil gives us enough rope to hang ourselves.

Satan doesn't have to do the dirty work in person, but rather he just baits the trap and waits as we foolishly step into it on our own volition.

II. PHINEHAS' PASSION (Numbers 25:6-15)

Moses and several others stood at the doorway of the tabernacle weeping because of immorality and idolatry of the people. While they were mourning an Israelite man and a Midianite woman passed by. Seeing the two of them walking together and suspecting their carnal intentions, a young man named Phinehas left the group and followed them. He saw the couple go into a tent, presumably to be physical with one another. Phinehas burst into the tent with a spear in his hand and shoved it through their bodies, killing both the man and the woman. The victims were named Zimri and Cozbi.

Because Phinehas had acted so passionately to prevent the sinful conduct, the LORD abruptly halted the plague. Sadly, some 24,000 people had already died as a result of it. God then told Moses to bestow a blessing upon Phinehas in recognition of his zealous behavior. He acknowledged and applauded Phinehas for defending God's honor and making atonement for the people of Israel.

Phinehas was the son of Eleazar and the grandson of Aaron. He was a priest. In the aftermath of this event God established a covenant of perpetual priesthood with him and his descendants. There are more stories involving Phinehas in the books of Joshua and Judges. Sometime after the conquest of Canaan, his father died and Phinehas became the third high priest of Israel.

Can you imagine what would happen today if a pastor burst into the home of one of their members and killed them because their sin was harming and disgracing the church? That pastor would probably be fired by his congregation and even imprisoned for committing such a barbarous act. Yet in this case, God actually commended Phinehas for his boldness. Many modern-day pastors are hesitant to confront any sin present in their congregations. It is true that Phinehas took extreme measures, but at least he stood up against the sin in his camp and refused to let it continue unchecked.

III. MIDIAN'S MASSACRE (Numbers 25:16-18; 31:1-54)

Following this incident, God told Moses to turn his hostilities toward all of the Midianites because they had intentionally sought to deceive and mislead Israel. So Moses amassed an army of 12,000 men - one thousand from each tribe - and sent them to make war against Midian. Phinehas was specifically selected to accompany these men in battle.

The men of Israel utterly defeated the five kings of Midian - Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba. They killed every Midianite male, and captured most of their women. They burned the Midianite cities and camps with fire, and took much spoil. Later on, Moses instructed his soldiers to also kill all of the female captives who were not virgins because of their harlotry against Israel. In the end, Midian was completely slaughtered.

Balaam, the original architect of Midian's evil plan to seduce Israel, was also killed during this military campaign. Although he had inflicted significant damage upon God's people, Balaam's schemes ultimately failed. Midian and Moab were subdued, and now Moses and his followers could finally begin making preparations for the long-awaited invasion of the Promised Land.

Some Bible critics point to the slaughter of Midian as an example of excessive force. They suggest that God's children took measures too far. They argue that this story shows God to be an unloving and vengeful deity not fit to be worshiped by anyone. But such thinking is deeply flawed. God did not command his children to act out against an innocent people. The Midianites were guilty transgressors who intentionally provoked and angered God. The LORD judged them for the blatant sinfulness, and rightly so.

CONCLUSION

As we pause to consider how the slaughter of Midian applies to our lives today, there are a few observations that stand out. I have made mention of these already, but let me quickly review them before we close the message.

First, any plan formulated against God will ultimately fail. No matter how brilliant they might seem, there is no strategy that can successfully outflank the LORD. You simply can't beat God... and only a fool would try.

Second, Christian leaders need to courageously confront overt and unabashed sin within the church. While not literally, the body of Christ still suffers figuratively from a devastating plague that has been brought on by rampant sin of its members.

Third, God is just in His judgment of the wicked. The vile and detestable nature of sin deserves His punishment. Who are we to question His justice?

Fourth, while Satan does attack people directly on occasion often times he takes a much more subtle approach. By appealing to our sinful nature, he deceives us into destroying ourselves.

Is there someone listening to me right now who is struggling with temptation? Have your carnal lusts and fleshly desires gotten the best of you? Have you been unfaithful to God in some way? If so, now would be a great time to confess your sin, to receive His forgiveness, and to turn back to the LORD.

How to Divide - Numbers 26, 27, & 36

Originally Preached on 10/23/2016

"I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." - Genesis 17:8

As you all know, we have been preaching and teaching chronologically through the events of the exodus for the past several months. Using the historical books of Exodus and Numbers primarily, we have carefully examined the incredible journey of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt to the plains of Moab. Along the way we have discovered several principles that God taught his people during this epic adventure, and we've made application of these to our own lives and to the church today.

After thoroughly routing the Midianites, killing the wicked prophet Balaam, and silencing any immediate threat from the remaining Moabites, the children of Israel were finally at peace. All of the adversarial kingdoms in the region were either defeated or subdued. Moses and his followers were now able to turn their full attention to the great task that still lied before them - the conquest of the Promised Land.

38 years earlier, just before Israel departed from Mt. Sinai, Moses conducted a census to determine the total number of warriors in his army. Years later, after all but two of those who'd been originally counted had died in the wilderness, Moses organized a second census. As they camped just east of the Jordan river preparing for another invasion, a recount took place - again to determine the population of the new congregation. As I pointed out earlier in this series, this book is called Numbers because it includes details about these two censuses.

In today's study, we will find a key difference between the first and second census. We will also learn about a courageous group of ladies and what they did in response to the census. Finally, we will see how God honored these women for their actions.

I. THE SECOND CENSUS (Numbers 26:1-65)

Moses commissioned a second census that took place on the plains of Moab, near the end of his life. While Aaron had conducted the first census, this time Eleazar - his son - would lead the initiative. As they had done before, all men ages 20 and up who were healthy enough to fight were included in the count. Each of the 12 tribes was numbered individually not including the Levites who were considered separately. When the second census was completed, the total population of Israel was measured at approximately 602,000. This was only slightly less than the results of the first census. In other words, the overall size of the congregation had remained roughly the same over the course of the exodus. For each person who died in the wilderness, a child had been born to replace them.

It is important to point out that only two men who had been counted during the first census were still alive and included in the second census. God had allowed Joshua and Caleb to survive the wilderness

wanderings and subsequent battles, because they were the two spies who had trusted in him at Kadesh Barnea. As such, they would have the privilege of invading Canaan with the new generation of Israel. Moses himself was also still alive, but as a member of the tribe of Levi, he was not included in either census.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the two censuses is the reason for which it was conducted. At Mt. Sinai, Moses counted the people primarily to determine the size of his military force. Almost four decades had passed and now Moses was numbering the people again, but this time for a very different reason. The LORD instructed Moses to divide the Promised Land among the tribes of Israel based upon their size, so that the larger tribes received more land and the smaller tribes less. To do this properly, an accurate census of the tribes was necessary.

Consider this - the first census was done to measure Israel's military ability and to determine their likelihood of success over the hostile inhabitants of Canaan. The second census, however, assumed that God would provide the victory regardless of the size and strength of the enemy, and was conducted instead to determine how the land would be divided after the opposition had been defeated. The differing motivations of these two censuses reveal how the faith of Israel had changed and grown from one generation to the next.

II. THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD (Numbers 27:1-11)

The LORD told Moses to apportion the land by lot based upon the names of the father. In other words, the land would be divided and given to the men of each tribe. The women and children would share in this blessing through their relationships with their husbands or fathers. However, women would not own any land themselves. Thus land would be deeded and passed down from generation to generation among the fathers of each household.

Upon hearing this law, the daughters of Zelophehad were deeply troubled. Their father had died in the wilderness and had no sons. These five sisters were all that was left of his posterity, but as females they were not entitled to an allotment of land. So the daughters took their case to Moses. They explained the situation, careful to mention that their dad had not been involved in Korah's Rebellion but was an honorable man, and asked Moses to include Zelophehad's name in the division of the land.

Moses listened to their concern, and took the question to God. In the end the LORD agreed with the daughters of Zelophehad and instructed Moses to give them possession of their father's land as his rightful heirs. The law of inheritance was modified to accommodate for situations in which there were no sons, no children, no brothers, or other special circumstances. These women were to be granted a portion of the land once the conquest of Canaan was complete.

Many critics of the Bible accuse God of being unfairly biased against women. While the cultural norms of these times (and even today) certainly favored men, this story is one of many examples in Scripture that show how God honors women. The LORD made sure that these sisters were treated equally and

received their inheritance just as the men did. While God has undoubtedly established different roles for men and women which are detailed in Scripture, He does not value or esteem one gender over the other.

III. THE INHERITANCE PRESERVED (Numbers 36:1-13)

The daughters of Zelophehad had successfully secured an inheritance based upon their deceased father's name. However, there remained a problem. The law only allowed for female ownership when there was no rightful male available. So if and when these ladies married, the property would be transferred into their husband's name. As descendants of the tribe of Manasseh, what would happen to the land if they married someone from another tribe? Would their allotment be taken from the tribe of Manasseh and given to another tribe?

These questions led some of the men from the tribe of Manasseh to approach Moses. They were happy that their relatives, the daughter of Zelophehad, were to receive a share of land. However, they wanted to ensure that this inheritance would stay perpetually in the tribe of Manasseh where it belonged. Moses again approached God, asking Him what to do. The LORD told Moses to direct these women to marry within their own tribe. By doing this, the property would remain within the inheritance of Manasseh. God made arrangements to secure each tribe's inheritance so that it could not be lost or transferred to another tribe.

When God grants someone an inheritance, He does not take it away. To do so would be contrary to His divine nature. This story literally demonstrates this principle. Therefore, when someone genuinely accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and is given an inheritance in Heaven by God Almighty, regardless of who they are, they can be certain that their eternal estate is secure. It will never be lost or transferred to another.

CONCLUSION

Before we close the sermon today, let me reemphasize the three major applications that we've covered. First, a confident faith assumes that God will win the final victory. Second, though they were created with different characteristics and roles to play, the LORD values men and women equally. Third, God does not revoke or take back an inheritance that He has promised to give someone.

Perhaps today you need to claim your heavenly inheritance. Call on the name of Jesus and ask Him to forgive you of your sins and to give you eternal life. Don't miss out on your portion of the glorious Promised Land.

Don't Settle - Numbers 32 & 34

Originally Preached on 10/30/2016

“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.” - 1 John 2:15-17

The Children of Israel were still camped just east of the Jordan River on the plains of Moab where they were making final preparations to invade Canaan. God had instructed them to divide the Promised Land - once it had been conquered of course - among the twelve tribes based upon their relative sizes. In keeping with this command, Moses had ordered and conducted a second census to determine the current population of each tribe. Now that those numbers had been tabulated, dividing the land proportionally would be much easier.

But what were to be the outer borders of the Promised Land? How could the inheritance be divided into pieces without first clearly defining its boundaries? In other words, what were to be the specific dimensions of Israel? How much land were they to conquer? How far were they to advance? These geographic lines needed be drawn in order to clearly define area of land in question. Fortunately, God spoke to Moses and provided detailed information establishing the borders of Israel.

The nation of Israel was given by God to the descendants of Jacob as an everlasting inheritance. Despite its turbulent history, the LORD has preserved and protected Israel for centuries. In the end times, Israel will be restored to its former glory and Jesus our Messiah will reign from Jerusalem over the entire earth. Israel will always be God's chosen nation.

This morning we will lay out the God-given boundaries of Israel. This was to be the eternal inheritance of Jacob, divided up among the twelve tribes. But would they all want it, or would some of the tribes settle for something else?

I. THE BORDERS OF ISRAEL (Numbers 34:1-12)

God gave Moses the specific measurements of Israel. Its border was to begin at the southern tip of the Dead Sea and extend southward along the edge of Edom. From there it turned westward and crossed the dry and desolate Wilderness of Zin. Upon reaching the Brook of Egypt the border slanted northward until it reached the Mediterranean Sea. This line made up the southern border of Israel.

The western border of Israel was the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea.

The northern border began at the Mediterranean Sea and extended eastward toward Mt. Hor. From

there it continued to Zedad and Ziphron, finally ending at Hazar-enan.

The eastern border was drawn from Hazar-enan down to the northern tip of the Sea of Galilee. It then ran southward along the eastern shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, down the length of the Jordan River, and along the eastern shoreline of the Dead Sea.

These were the boundaries of Israel as determined by God and recorded in Scripture. Any land within these borders was part of the Promised Land and rightfully belonged to Israel. That said, any region outside of these clearly established borders was not considered part of the Promised Land and, subsequently, was not part of God's covenant agreement to Israel.

II. THE EASTERN TRIBES (Numbers 32:1-42)

While God's children were camped in Moab, in an area also known as Gilead, two of the twelve tribes - namely Reuben and Gad - decided that they'd rather have an inheritance there than receiving a portion of the Promised Land. The regions of Gilead and Bashan were suitable for their large herds of livestock, and so they requested that these be given to them as their possession. These two tribes were content to settle in Moab and to not cross over the Jordan with their brethren.

Upon hearing their request, Moses was quite upset. Israel was about to invade and conquer Canaan, to displace all of the people who were living currently there, and to occupy it as an everlasting possession. It would take all of them standing and fighting together to accomplish such a monumental task. And now, unexpectedly, two of the twelve tribes seemingly wanted to back out. It seemed to Moses that Reuben and Gad were turning their back on the remaining tribes, not willing to finish the mission.

Moses remembered what had happened years before at Kadesh Barnea and how Israel became discouraged by the spies' negative report and decided not to invade the Promised Land. He was determined not to let that happen again. So he made the Reubenites and Gadites promise to accompany the rest of Israel into Canaan. Moses offered them the land of Gilead and Bashan as their inheritance so long as they sent warriors into the Promised Land to fight alongside the remaining tribes. Reuben and Gad agreed to these terms.

Because they solemnly pledged to help the rest of Israel in its conquest of Canaan, Moses went ahead and reluctantly gave the tribes of Reuben and Gad their inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Apparently some division arose within the tribe of Manasseh over this incident and it split. Half of Manasseh aligned itself with Reuben and Gad. When it was all said and done, 2 ½ tribes decided to settle beyond the Jordan while the other 9 ½ received their inheritance within the Promised Land. The tribes of Reuben and Gad, along with the half-tribe of Manasseh, became known as the eastern tribes.

III. WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM (Joshua 22:1-34)

In the years that followed the eastern tribes made good on their promise. Under the leadership of

Joshua, during the period of conquest, men from these tribes fought valiantly alongside their brothers to defeat the Canaanites. After the Promised Land had been taken and settled by the remaining Israelites, the descendants of the eastern tribes returned to their possession beyond the Jordan and settled there.

The Jordan River formed a barrier that effectively cut off the eastern tribes from the manifest presence of God which resided in the tabernacle at Shiloh. Therefore, they decided to build an altar that would serve as a replica of the one in Israel. Their duplicate altar was not used for burnt offerings - as a matter of fact, no sacrifices were made on it at all. It was built solely to identify the eastern tribes with their relatives in Israel. It was completely void of God's presence - just a cheap copy of the real altar.

As time went by, the eastern tribes became increasingly nomadic and their possession became more and more blurred. Because they were outside of the Promised Land and separated from their kinsmen by the Jordan River, the eastern tribes were never really considered to be a viable part of the nation of Israel. They gradually faded into obscurity. The land of Bashan and Gilead was eventually conquered by Assyria, and even today this territory is occupied by the nations of Jordan and Syria.

Sadly, the legacy of the eastern tribes reflects strongly upon many Christians today. Many willingly exchange the promises of tomorrow for the pleasures of today. They are content with a mediocre Christianity that lives just outside of God's abundant blessing. They want to live close to the will of God, but not actually in it. They'd rather abide near Him than in Him. They don't mind being associated with the LORD and His people, but don't necessarily feel the need to be a part of them. They are easily satisfied with the good, and therefore never realize God's best. They readily forfeit their eternal inheritance for a temporal one.

CONCLUSION

Don't be like Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh. Don't accept a substitute in place of God's promise. It is the LORD's desire for His children to live in the very center of His will, not skirting around the edges of it. God wants us to be living sacrifices who offer our lives willingly on the true altar - not pretenders who offer nothing on imitation altars built for show. The LORD has reserved an inheritance for us - not only in the next life, but in this life as well. Don't settle for anything less than His best.

Moses' Last Charge - Deuteronomy 29 & 30

Originally Preached on 11/6/2016

"And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it." - 2 John 1:6

My oldest son, Owen, is a freshman this year at Vernon College. One of his courses is on public speaking. As you might expect, one of the major requirements of this class is to prepare and deliver speeches. As he has done this, Owen has become more comfortable with and adept at speaking before groups of people. As the leader of the exodus, Moses often found himself addressing the all or parts of the congregation of Israel. With so much practice, is it any surprise that he became one of the greatest speakers in the entire Bible?

The book of Deuteronomy is primarily a collection of three written speeches or addresses that Moses delivered to his people during their encampment in Moab. These were likely delivered in a matter of days near the end of Moses' life. Most of the content in this book is in quotations, with only minor non-spoken headings included between the orations. The word "Deuteronomy" actually means "repeated law" and is used because it fits the main topic of Moses' speeches. In these addresses he restates much of the law which was originally given to the first generation of Israel at Mt. Sinai and recorded in the book of Leviticus.

Though there is some redundancy, the book of Deuteronomy does contain a few additional laws and new material not found in Leviticus. However, for simplicity's sake, we can consider it to be basically a renewal of the previous vow. In other words, the sons and daughters of the first generation who are now on the verge of invading the Promised Land are being called to recommit themselves to the covenant that their parents had made in Midian but failed to keep.

The three speeches recorded in the pages of Deuteronomy touch on differing topics. The first reviews the historical events of the exodus and celebrates God's faithfulness to His people. The second, which is the longest of the three, restates much of the law that was given at Mt. Sinai. The third address calls the people to renew their commitment to God and His commands, promising and blessing or a curse dependent upon the people's choice.

This morning we will study a portion of Moses third speech - his final charge to the people of God. These are his last words to Israel. He knew that he would not be with them much longer, and would not be crossing over the Jordan himself. Thus, he set forth a tremendous challenge that would endure long after he was gone. His words still apply to Christians today just as they did to the assembly in Moab centuries ago.

I. THE CURSE (Deuteronomy 29:1-29)

After reviewing the laws, ordinances, and statutes that God had given to Israel, Moses begins to present the consequences that will come as a result of disobedience. He has seen and experienced firsthand how the first generation forsook these laws and invoked God's judgment. Having wandered in the desert for almost 40 years under the heavy hand of the LORD, Moses foresees that these new generation will fail to keep their vow to God as well. Thus, he details some of the curses that will surely come in the future as a result of their disloyalty to God and the renewed covenant.

The LORD promises to curse those who walk in stubbornness, unwilling to repent, stating that He will not forgive them and that His anger will burn against them. Furthermore, God will single him out individually as a target for adversity. Collectively, God will curse the nation that forsakes Him and lives in disobedience. Its' land will become as waste, desolate and unproductive. Plagues and various diseases will afflict it. Ultimately the people of the wayward nation will be uprooted and scattered, as it will fall under the yoke of foreign powers.

Simply stated, continual disobedience to God bring about the curse - His divine and righteous judgment upon sin. Moses prophesied that this would surely happen at some point to the people of Israel, because he understood the sinful nature of men.

II. THE BLESSING (Deuteronomy 30:1-10)

Despite the severity of the curses and Moses' certainty that Israel will violate this covenant, He prophesies of a coming future when the people will return to God and be restored. Against this backdrop, Moses describes the abundant blessings that come with obedience to the LORD's commands. The first is that God will gather those who have been scattered among the nations and bring them back to possess the land of Israel that He promised to them. Not only will they return, but will multiply and prosper them as His blessed and chosen people. God will again anoint the work of their hands and the fruitfulness of their land.

One of the most wonderful and unique aspects of this covenant it that the LORD promises to circumcise the hearts of those who obey him. In so doing, He inscribes the love of God into the hearts and souls of people. In other words, the covenant is more than merely a legalistic contractual agreement between two parties, but rather a loving relational commitment seared within the hearts of both God and man. The abundant blessings that flow will come not simply because they are the terms of the covenant, but because of the immeasurable and boundless love that emanates from the Father.

In short, God bless obedience. While Moses is acutely aware of man's weakness and carnal nature, He is also confident in God's strength and mercy. The LORD has the power to restore broken and sinful people. Though this covenant overtly ties blessings with good works, it also reveals the LORD's willingness to forgive and restore His imperfect but repentant children. Stated another way, God doesn't require perfection as the condition of blessing. He blesses those who lovingly follow Him, though on occasion they surely stumble and fall.

III. THE CHOICE (Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

Having set before the congregation the commands of God, and having explained the blessings and curses that are associated with them, Moses now make his final charge to the people. He presents them with a choice between life and death, between the blessing and the curse. As he does so, Moses urges them to choose life though he undoubtedly knows that most will not.

Some teachers have interpreted this to be an evangelical passage referring to the choice between salvation and eternal life in heaven and condemnation or eternal death in hell. While not discounting this view completely, I think that Moses is speaking more about the temporal blessings and curses that we receive in this life. The people being addressed are not pagans who need to hear about God - they are already God's chosen people and are quite familiar with Him. Moses is not exhorting a group of lost people to come to salvation. Rather, he is urging the children of God who already know Him to walk in obedience to Him,

When he charges the people of the exodus to choose life, Moses is actually calling them to walk in obedience. He is calling them to actively and consciously choose to follow God by honoring and keeping His commandments.

CONCLUSION

We live in an age where "works" in theology is under fire because obedience is so unpopular. Some of these criticisms are justified, but not all of them. Clearly, the New Testament teaches that salvation comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This is the theme of the new covenant, and is clearly taught in numerous places and in various ways in the writings of the apostles. The only way that any person can be saved is through the grace of God, because no human can obey the law of God perfectly - Moses understood this 1500 years before the coming of Christ. Whats more, God graciously loves people even when they sin.

That said, do our works matter at all? Do they have any relevance or connection to Christians today? Absolutely yes! There is much said about the relationship between a true saving faith and the works that accompany it - particularly in the book of James. We must understand that though the blessings and curses that were spoken to Israel in Moab may take on different connotations and forms for us today, they still come as a result of our obedience and/or disobedience. Look at the condition of America, and tell me that she is not suffering as a result of disobedience to God!

In conclusion, what we does matters and there are real consequences that come as the result of our behaviors - disobedience comes with a steep price. And so, like Moses, I urge those listening to my voice today to love God, to walk in obedience to His commandments, and to hold fast to Him. Choose life (that is obedience), that you and your descendants after you might live under the lavish and bountiful blessings of our magnificently wonderful LORD.

The Death of Moses - Deuteronomy 32 & 34

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“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones.” - Psalm 116:15

This morning we will conclude the sermon series we’ve titled “The Wandering Church” after almost 7 months. We have read and been studying about the events of the Exodus and the amazing life of Moses. Along the way we have discovered many ancient truths and learned several valuable lessons that still have bearing on our lives presently as Christians and as God’s Church.

We have seen a clear progression take place within the exodus story. God miraculously delivered the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, just as He can deliver sinners from the bondage of sin and death. God developed His people at Mt. Sinai by providing them the law, just as He develops believers today as they grow in the knowledge and devotion to Him. The people disobeyed God and subsequently wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, just as many disobey Him today and suffer the consequences of their disobedience. Finally God lovingly forgave His people and brought them to Moab to try again, just as He forgives our mistakes and is always willing to grant us second chances.

In this final message we will take a look at the death, burial, and legacy of Moses. Certain details about this story are quite mysterious. The Bible does not give us the answers to all of the questions that are raised in these passages. Nevertheless, Moses’ death marked the end of the exodus era. Following his demise, Joshua became the new leader and the conquest of the Promised Land began. I look forward to that series sometime in the future, but for now we will turn to the closing chapters of Deuteronomy...

I. THE DEATH (Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:1-5,7)

God instructed Moses to climb Mt. Nebo and to view the Promised Land from that vantage point. Moses had already been told that he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land because of his sin at the Rock of Meribah. We studied this in a sermon called “Two Strikes, You’re Out” several weeks ago. Although Moses pleaded with God to reconsider, ultimately he humbly accepted the LORD’s decision not to allow him to enter Canaan. That said, Moses was allowed to survey the Promised Land from the peak of Mt. Nebo.

Furthermore, God informed Moses that he would die while atop Mt. Nebo. This seems strange because the Bible indicates that, despite his age, Moses was strong and in good health. It leads some to ask, “How exactly did Moses die?” Well, we don’t know. Perhaps he had a sudden and fatal heart attack, or perhaps a tragic accident took place while he was at the summit. Whatever the case, his appointed time came and Moses abruptly died. The unique aspect of this story is that Moses knew he was going to die on the mountain before he went up, yet rather than cowering from it he still bravely climbed up.

In this respect, the death of Moses mirrors that of Jesus. The Messiah knew that upon His return to

Jerusalem He would be arrested, tried, and crucified. He told the disciples in advance and on multiple occasions that this would happen. Still, Jesus courageously determined to bear the cross knowing that it was necessary for the salvation of mankind. To a lesser degree, Moses knew that his death would allow Joshua to take the lead and allow Israel to finally claim their Promised Land.

II. THE BURIAL (Deuteronomy 34:6)

In the story of Aaron's death three men ascended Mt. Hor together, but only two returned. In this case, however, Moses apparently climbed to the peak of Mt. Nebo alone. There was no other person there with him. This raises another question that many have asked - "What happened to Moses' body when he died?" The Bible clearly states that God buried Moses. This is a peculiar and special occurrence - to think that God Himself personally did this.

Furthermore, the Scriptures indicate that no one knows where the body of Moses was laid. In other words, God buried him in an unmarked grave which could not and has not been found. Why would He do such a thing? It has been proposed that God did not want the people to build a monument to or shrine for Moses and worship there. God was aware of the people's tendency to chase after idols, and did not want Moses's grave to be tainted in such a way. Nevertheless, many of the circumstances surrounding Moses' burial remain a mystery.

Adding to this intrigue, in the book of Jude (1:9) we learn that following Moses' death the archangel Michael and Satan contended over the body of Moses. It is uncertain exactly what they were arguing about or why the Devil wanted Moses' corpse. While somewhat unclear, this dispute definitely highlights the importance of Moses and all that he did for the LORD's people. The Bible never states that Satan wanted anyone else's body, so Moses must have been a pretty big deal. In the end God denied Satan's request, instead burying Moses Himself in an undisclosed location.

III. THE LEGACY (Deuteronomy 34:8-12)

Following the death and burial of Moses, the children of Israel mourned his loss for 30 days. Again we are left to wonder how they knew that he had died. Perhaps he told Joshua or the people before he climbed the mountain that he would not be coming back. In any event, after their period of grieving Joshua was named the new leader of Israel. Moses had already designated Joshua to take over after his death. The exploits of Joshua and the children of God are described in the book of Joshua.

The Bible pays tribute to Moses in several ways. It states that no prophet like Moses has ever risen in Israel. He knew God face-to-face, meaning that he enjoyed the personal and immediate presence of God in a way that no other prophet did. In addition God worked through Moses to perform many of the greatest miracles in the history of Israel such as the 10 plagues of Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. Moses is held up throughout Scripture as one of the greatest prophets of all time.

Because Moses never physically entered the Promised Land during his lifetime, some have argued that

he failed to achieve God's will for his life. He had been called to lead the children of Israel into Canaan, which ultimately he never did. However, I don't see Moses as a failure. He was the leader of an obstinate and unruly people, yet Moses remained faithful to them in spite of it all. So many pastors are quick to leave their congregations when things don't go well, but Moses was loyal. He was a success in that he remained committed to God and His people despite all of the hardships and setbacks. Because of what Moses did, Joshua was positioned to lead the next generation to accomplish greater things.

CONCLUSION

Some 1500 years after the exodus ended, in the weeks before Jesus death, the transfiguration of Christ took place on a mountaintop within the borders of Israel. We read of this miraculous event in the New Testament gospels. Can you guess who was present there? Jesus, a few of His disciples, Elijah, and... Moses. That's right! Moses ultimately got to enter into the Promised Land, and in the company of Jesus no less. Whats more, he (along with all of the saints) will be present in the New Jerusalem at the end of the age. Moses will experience for the ages to come what he only saw from a distance back then.

Like Moses, we too have been called to come and die (perhaps not literally). We too can boldly climb the mountains before us and embrace God's will - no matter what it might be. We can say "yes" to Him knowing that when we do, He will advance His kingdom in mighty ways.

Like Moses, we too can catch a glimpse of our Promised Land. By studying the Scriptures we can develop a vision of Heaven. Though we may not be able to enter into our eternal home just yet, the view looks really good! We can rest in the hope that we will be there someday soon.

And so our series has drawn to an end. The exodus has finished and the conquest of Canaan is set to begin. Moses has died and been buried, marking the end of an era in the history of Israel. But a new chapter was just beginning... a bright future that held great promise.