

The Sea of Opportunity

Today In Your Reading...

God led His people out of Egypt after 430 years of bondage. What a time that must have been! The Lord led Israel with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, visual reminders that He was there to lead, to provide, and to protect His people. However, even though God brought Israel out of Egypt, He was not yet finished with Egypt. By causing Israel to wander in the desert, the Lord enticed Pharaoh to pursue the people and trap them by the Red Sea. It was to be the final blow, so that "God would receive great glory at the expense of Pharaoh and his armies, and so that all the Egyptians would know that He is the Lord" (14:4).

Of course, God opened up the sea so that His people passed through on dry land, but then He covered Pharaoh's army with the waters and drowned them all. Not one soldier who chased the Israelites into the sea remained. Instead, their lifeless bodies littered the shoreline.

None of us have ever witnessed such a spectacle like this. However, in a much smaller sense, we do experience Red Sea trials quite often. The Lord ordains scenarios for us in which there seems to be no way out, where we are stuck between a rock and a hard place. *He arranges situations in which the only solution to our problem is Him.* Of course, **if we truly trust the Lord and put our hope in Him, we are never really stuck, are we?**

Therefore, the Red Sea represents impasses in our lives, our great hurdles to overcome, obstacles that cause us to cry out to the Lord and, at times, even complain. However, the Red Sea also represents an opportunity to witness the awesome hand of God work wonders on our behalf! **Is it a sea of fear and trembling or a sea of faith? It's our choice.**

Daily Reflection

How do you typically view Red Seas, as cruel inconveniences or opportunities to grow in faith?

What are some things you should do when you approach a Red Sea? What are some things you shouldn't do when you approach a Red Sea?

Remember this, **it was God who led the Israelites to the edge of the sea.** He placed them there to display His power. He knew the outcome of the trial. He was in control and all happened as He intended. Take time today to recall some Red Seas that you have crossed in the past and, then, praise God for His faithfulness. As He has done before, He will do again.

"Do not fear! But stand by and watch the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today" (Exodus 14:13).

Challenges of the Desert

February 6 — *Exodus 16:1-19:25*

Day 37 — 328 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

God continued to lead His people out of Egypt into the Sinai peninsula, testing them as they went, to see if they were going to trust Him or abandon Him. At one point, they ran out of food and became hungry. Another time they ran out of water and grew thirsty. Then, finally, they were attacked by the Amalekites. God was challenging their faith with every step away from Egypt.

Some other important events took place as well, like the reunion with Jethro. He counseled Moses to select God-fearing men to assist him in leading and judging the people. You also read of God's visit to Mt. Sinai, where He would later reveal His laws.

However, let's back up and consider these tests of God. As much as the Israelites hated their former life of slavery in Egypt, they still desired its comforts and conveniences over trudging through the desert. They were not accustomed to trusting God for everything, for they had lived 430 years without knowing who He was and that He cared. These tests were too much for them, so they thought, and they complained bitterly against Moses, against Aaron, and against the Lord. But that was the point of the tests, to see if the people were truly going to rely upon the Lord to meet their needs.

The Lord proved faithful. He miraculously provided water twice, and He even provided daily meals, by sending manna and quail to eat. Every step of the way, God proved to them that He was their sole provider and that they could trust Him to take care of them. When they were attacked by the Amalekites, God proved that He was their protection. **Every instance where they ran up against a need, God was there,** ready, willing, and able to provide and protect His people.

Daily Reflection

Did you notice how much the people of Israel complained? Every time they faced a hardship, they griped and grumbled. While these challenges were meant to test their faith, the Lord was discovering that they had none.

What about you? When you are squeezed by trials or difficulties, what comes out of you — griping and grumbling or prayers and petitions?

The Israelites longed for the comfort and convenience of Egypt. Their instinct was to run from the challenges of the desert and return to their former way of life. What they did not realize was that they were slaves. **They were comfortable in their slavery but uncomfortable in their freedom** and unwilling to trust God and follow Him wherever He might take them.

Do you ever find yourself wishing for comfort and convenience rather than the "challenges of the desert" life, a place that causes you to trust in God? Which life is truly better for you? Why?

The Law of Love

Today In Your Reading...

God gave Moses and His people the laws by which He expected them to live. Israel was now a free nation, but its citizens knew nothing of how to live like one, so God helped them by providing guidelines. Basically, God's laws can be classified into three sections: *the ceremonial laws* (which were instructions for worshiping God through the sacrificial system), *the civil laws* (which were statutes for developing a civilized nation before and after they moved into Canaan), and *the moral laws* (which were the foundation on which the others depended).

Christians are not bound by the ceremonial laws, because we don't use the sacrificial system any longer. Jesus changed all of that (*Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:23-25*). However, we can tell by those ceremonial laws that God takes worship very seriously and that coming into His presence should not be taken lightly (more to come on this topic when we read about the Tabernacle).

Christians are not subject to the civil laws, which pertained only to Old Testament Israel. The laws were many and minute, and they were meant to expose the fact that the people could not keep them entirely. Therefore, their sinfulness would be evident, as well as their need for forgiveness. Paul wrote that the Law points us to our need for Christ (*Romans 7:7-9*). However, even though these laws may seem strange to us today, it is evident that God highly esteems life, liberty, and personal property.

Concerning the third category, the moral laws, **Christians are not bound by the Ten Commandments but rather by the two great commandments**. We are no longer under the Old Testament Law but rather we are under the Law of Christ (*Galatians 6:2*). The Law of Christ is simple, not burdensome (*1 John 5:3*); and, it

is summarized by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves (*Mark 12:30, 31*). These two commands of Christ summarize the Ten Commandments; if we love God and love others, we will fulfill all that is required of us.

While the two great commandments of Christ fulfill the Ten Commandments of Moses, that does not mean that we can neglect the Ten Commandments. They are practical ways that we can love God and love others. For example, if we love God, we will not worship idols; and, if we love others, we will not lie, steal, or murder.

Daily Reflection

Aren't you grateful for Christ and the fact that He has delivered you from the Law? The real question is do you live in such a way as you are free from the Law? Or do you live as if you are still under it, keeping up with Christian "rules," duties, obligations, and requirements?

Do you ever feel like you have to do something, or avoid doing something, or God will not love you, forgive you, or be happy with you? Explain.

Remember, **you are free from the Law**. You do not earn God's favor, His love, or His forgiveness. Because of Christ, you already have these things. *There is nothing you can do to cause God to love you more. Likewise, there is nothing you can do to cause God to love you less.* "For those in Christ, there is no longer any condemnation" (*Romans 8:1, 2*). **You are free!**

The Covenant in Canaan

February 8 — *Exodus 22:16-24:18*

Day 39 — 326 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We learned more of the civil laws, including the law of the seventh or sabbatical year for the land to rest, as well as for the annual festivals. We also witnessed God's promise to Israel regarding Canaan and Israel's promise to God regarding their covenant. Finally, Moses, Aaron and his sons, and seventy of Israel's leaders shared a meal together in God's presence!

I found it interesting today that, in *Exodus 23*, God gave the Israelites instructions for how to live in Canaan, their future home. Then, in *Exodus 24*, He made a covenant with them. At first glance, it may seem that these two events are not related but they are.

Regarding the people of Canaan, the Israelites were "not to make treaties with them." Neither were they "to have anything to do with their gods." In fact, the Lord said, "Do not even let them live among you. If you do, then they will infect you with their sin of idol worship and that would be disastrous" (23:32, 33).

Why did God give these strict warnings? They were directly related to the covenant which they made with Him. By entering into this covenant, the people were committing to worship only the Lord, never to make or bow down to idols or images, and to obey His laws (20:1-21). If they did these things, they would become God's "own special treasure from among the nations, a kingdom of priests, His holy nation" (19:5, 6).

Simply by worshiping one God, the Israelites would be different than the Canaanite tribes, who worshipped many gods. They were the only people to bear the mark of a covenant in their flesh (circumcision); and, the Lord's laws were peculiar — their diet, their sacrifices, their festivals, their Sabbath, etc. With all these things, the Israelites would be set apart for sure.

Daily Reflection

It has always been God's desire for His people to be set apart from the people of the world. Why? What's the point?

Relate God's warnings to Israel regarding Canaan to your interaction with the world.

God warned Israel not to make treaties with the Canaanites or to have anything to do with their gods. You must be cautious, when living in this world, not to compromise faith for its goods, for **there are many of the world's goods that will become your gods**, if you're not careful. Don't let it infect you with its sins or idols.

The Lord has called you to be separate, to stand out from the darkness here, to be in the world but not of the world. Have the gods of this world infected you? Have they caused you to compromise your faith?

According to the Pattern

Today In Your Reading...

God gave Moses His instructions for building the Tabernacle, His desert sanctuary, and all of its furnishings, which included the beautiful Ark of the Covenant and its Atonement Cover (also called the Mercy Seat), the Golden Table with the Bread of the Presence, the Golden Lampstand, the Tent of Meeting with all of its curtains and veils, the Bronze Altar where sacrifices would be made, the priestly clothing, and the courtyard with all of its boards and sockets.

As you would expect, the materials for this project were quite expensive — gold, silver, bronze, fine linens, goat hair, tanned ram skins, acacia wood, olive oil, spices, and precious stones. Where were slaves, in the middle of the desert, supposed to acquire such things? They didn't have to, for they were already given to them by the people of Egypt (*Exodus 12:35, 36*). God had already provided for His tabernacle. Now, He called the people to give offerings for it.

What was the Tabernacle? What was its purpose? The word "tabernacle" simple means "dwelling place." We might use the word "tent." It was a physical and portable dwelling place for the Lord to be among His people. Later, Solomon replaced the Tabernacle with the Temple in Jerusalem. The Tabernacle was the place where God's people and their priests could worship Him at all times with their sacrifices and offerings. It was also the place where He would forgive their sins, once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

While it is easy to get lost in the details that were described in today's reading, it is important to step back and see the significance of this place. It is a symbol or type of Christ, perhaps the most clear representation in the Old Testament of what Jesus will do when He comes. Every measurement, every material, and every activity related to the ministry of Jesus.

Since the Tabernacle would be the place where God's people would be reconciled to Him, it is important to note that they had to follow His instructions with no exceptions. Four times the Lord reminded Moses to make the Tabernacle and its furnishings exactly "according to the pattern that I will show you" (*Exodus 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8*).

What's the point? It is simply this — **it is God, not man, who determines when and how He will be approached and worshiped.** *We do not get to choose our own path to God. We come into His presence His way, not ours. Salvation is a work of God, not of our own doing. Therefore, the Lord gives the guidelines for how to be made right with Him.*

Daily Reflection

What are some of the ways that men have tried to worship God or earn His favor in their way?

Are you guilty of forcing your way with Him? You must be cautious. He must be worshiped in truth, as He has prescribed in His Word; and, how you are made right with Him is not left to your wisdom or preference. **Salvation is found in one way, Jesus Christ.** Be careful that you do not presume too much of God. Remember His warnings — if the people did not follow His instructions regarding the Tabernacle, they would be cut off. They would die.

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man comes to the Father but by Me" (*John 14:6*).

Gifted for Service

February 10 — *Exodus 29:1-31:38*

Day 41 — 324 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Moses continued his preparations for the Tabernacle. He was commanded by God to consecrate Aaron and his sons for the work of the priesthood. To consecrate means “to set apart” or “to dedicate.” Aaron and his descendants would forever provide spiritual leadership in the area of the sacrificial system, so it was important that they be “holy before the Lord.” That way the sacrifices of the people would not be tainted by the men who were mediating for them.

Moses was also given instructions for the altar of incense, which would stand before the Holy of Holies. Then, God discussed with Moses the anointing oil, the ingredients for the special incense, and more details about how to observe the Sabbath.

However, the comments that I thought were most interesting today were those concerning the craftsmen who constructed the Tabernacle. God said, “Look, I have chosen Bezalel... I have filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, intelligence, and skill in all kinds of crafts...” (31:2, 3). Bezalel took the lead in building the Tabernacle and its furnishings. God also called Oholiab to be his assistant (31:6).

These appointments are exciting to me because it gives evidence that **God equips people to do His work**. In fact, He said, “I have given special skill to all the naturally talented craftsmen so that they can make all the things I have instructed you to make...” (31:6).

In the New Testament, each believer is blessed by the Spirit of God with certain gifts or abilities (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:7, 11, 18; Eph. 4:11-13). The spiritual gifts are not given to us so that we can boast of them or use them for our own selfish ambitions, but so that we can use them in the service of the Lord in the Church.

However, many Christians misunderstand the spiritual gifts or do not know or recognize their own gift(s), and, therefore, fail to use them.

God provides spiritual gifts to be used in His Church for the benefit of His people.

Thus, when His people fail to identify their gifts or neglect to exercise them in their local churches, the Church body suffers. It does not function the way that it should.

Daily Reflection

Have you identified your spiritual gift(s)? If so, what are they? If not, start here (read *Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 1 Pet. 4:10, 11*).

How are you using your gift(s) in the local church? How have you seen God bless the use of your gifts to encourage other believers?

You need the Church, and the Church needs you. If you are not using your gift, then the rest of the body suffers. Be a good steward and don't let it go to waste. He has given you the gift of His choice, to be used for His purposes. Make sure to use it to the best of your ability!

Spiritual Prostitutes

Today In Your Reading...

The Israelites, while impatiently waiting for Moses to return from the mountain, crafted and worshiped a golden calf. As a result, Moses threw down and shattered the tablets with the Ten Commandments. Then, he called on the Levites to eliminate the guilty parties (about 3,000 people). Moses broke up the idol and made the people drink its pieces, then he returned to the mountain to intercede for the people, hoping to alleviate God's anger and remove the plague He had sent to punish them.

We also read about Moses' incredible experiences meeting with the Lord on the mountain and in the Tent of Meeting. As a result, his face would glow like a light bulb, and he had to cover it up when he was around the people. God also replaced the Ten Commandment tablets.

It is always amazing to me how quickly the people of Israel abandoned their covenant with God. Just a few chapters earlier (24:3), they shouted in unison, "We will do everything that the Lord has told us to do." Yet, in only eight chapters (32:1), they asked Aaron, "Make us gods who can lead us." When the Lord told Moses what they were doing, He said, "Quick, go down the mountain! The people have already turned from the way I commanded them to live" (32:7, 8). What a bunch of hypocrites!

Why were the people so ready to make images and idols? What was it about them that was bent to worship powerless objects? It was obvious that **they had left Egypt, but Egypt had not yet left them**. Their hearts were rebellious and idolatrous.

God was concerned about sending them into Canaan, which was a land full of idol worshippers. He knew they would be tempted by their pagan culture. In fact, He referred to the Canaanites as

"spiritual prostitutes who commit adultery" regularly with other gods (34:15). Imagine if a husband, who had vowed before a host of witnesses to be faithful to his wife, turned around and within a week had slept with other women. Imagine the betrayal, the jealousy, the heartache, and the anger the wife would experience when she found out. That's how the Lord felt with the unfaithful Israelites.

Daily Reflection

Christians regularly commit "spiritual adultery" today. How so? In what ways do we cheat on our holy Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus?

What are some of the "lovers" in your life, those things that distract you from the Lord or cause you to worship them with time and money?

Have you surrendered all to the Lord? If so, then be faithful to Him. Cherish your relationship with Him enough to guard yourself against other loves. **Don't be a spiritual prostitute!**