

Israel's Journey to the Red Sea

*“Now these things
happened unto
them by way of
example; and they
were written for
our admonition,
upon whom the
ends of the ages
are come.”*

*—I Corinthians
10:11, American
Standard Version*

Following the death of Egypt's firstborn and the passing over of the firstborn of Israel, Pharaoh determined to let the Israelites go. (Exod. 12:29-32) The morning after the eventful Passover night they gathered at Rameses to start their journey toward Canaan, the land which God had promised to Abraham.

(Gen. 15:18-21; Exod. 3:8) In our opening scripture, the Apostle Paul says that those things that happened to the Israelites were written as examples, or “types,” for our learning. As Christians, we can draw lessons from God's dealings with these ancient people that should help us avoid the mistakes they made and exercise greater faith in God's care over us than did they.

Rameses, from which the Israelites began their journey, was one of the “treasure cities” built for Pharaoh by this enslaved people. (Exod. 1:11; 12:37)

Rameses was also the title of the Pharaoh of the oppression, and it becomes a most fitting name for the city from whence the Israelites would begin their journey toward the promised land of Canaan. The Egyptians were sun worshipers. Their sun god was "Ra." It is not surprising that this particular Pharaoh took unto himself the title Rameses, which means "child of the sun." We know, however, from the standpoint of the Truth, that Rameses was not actually a giver of light either to Egypt or to the Israelites. It was he who had so enslaved the children of Israel that they cried for deliverance. Their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, heard and delivered them.—Exod. 2:23-25; 3:7-10

There is an interesting correspondence in this respect in connection with God's dealings with Christians today—that is, spiritual Israelites. (Rom. 8:14; Heb. 3:5,6; I Pet. 2:5,9,10) We, too, as it were, have a Pharaoh of our oppression. He is Satan, originally named Lucifer, which means "light-bearer." Like Pharaoh of old, he has been far from a true light. Yet he has, through his various deceptive methods, appeared as an "angel of light." (II Cor. 11:14) It has been true that under the direction of Satan, God's professed people have been led to build treasure cities—great church systems which have masqueraded as true cities of God. We note, however, that Egypt does not merely represent the great church systems any more than their treasure cities constituted all of Egypt. Egypt more particularly represents the world or kingdom of darkness and death in which, at one time or another, all of God's spiritual Israelites have been enslaved.—Rom. 8:21-23; Gal. 4:1-7

There was not anything that the enslaved of Israel could do about their own deliverance. Deliverance from Egypt was accomplished by God. It is God also, through his overruling providences and by way of the shed blood of Jesus, the greater Passover Lamb, who brings about our deliverance, our redemption. (John 1:29; I Cor. 5:7) It is well to note in this respect that although the sprinkled blood of the Passover lamb resulted in the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, it did not necessarily bring them to the promised land. Thus it is with spiritual Israelites today. God has delivered us by way of the blood of Jesus, but continued faithfulness to the conditions of our call is necessary if we are to finally enter into the heavenly Canaan.

Continued faith in the God who had delivered them by way of the Passover blood was the only surety the Israelites had of final entry into the land of promise. This exercise of faith by sprinkling the blood of the Passover lamb upon their lintels and door posts was accounted by God as a manifestation of their obedience. (Exod. 12:22,23) Failure to continue to exercise this same degree of faith was accounted by God as a manifestation of their disobedience. God remembered their frames that they were but dust and continued to bear with them for a long period of time. (Ps. 103:14; Romans chapter 11) However, their persistence to doubt and to forget God caused him finally to cease his striving with them. For this failure to continue faithful and obedient, he turned them back, not into Egypt, but into the wilderness to die. (Num. 14:22,23) Let us remember well the words of our opening text, in which Paul tells us that what happened to Israel

happened to them for examples. May their example of unbelief and disobedience be a warning to help us walk more faithfully and “worthy of the vocation” wherein we are called.—Eph. 4:1

Let us not presume upon God, nor account the things he has done for us as being ordinary and commonplace. We must not take for granted that because he once dealt with us while we were yet in our sins, giving us deliverance through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, that he will continue to deal with us without our showing any evidence of an ever-increasing appreciation and faith. It is through our faith and obedience to God that we show our appreciation of what he has already done for us. Undoubtedly this is what the apostle means when he says: “Without faith it is impossible to please him.” (Heb. 11:6) It is not reasonable to suppose that God will continue to shower his “spiritual blessings” upon us if we do not use them as a means of strengthening our faith in him and increasing our zeal for him and his cause.—Eph. 1:3

“No Continuing City”

All the Israelites were ready to start for the promised land, ready to accept the deliverance which God was offering to them. Accordingly, they met at Rameses, and from there they journeyed to Succoth. (Num. 33:5) The name Succoth means “booths” and is a good reminder of the fact that their journey toward Canaan, while giving to them liberty and freedom from servitude in Egypt, was, on the other hand, a call to them for the self-denial of many of the conveniences and necessities which their homes in Egypt undoubtedly supplied. *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) No longer were the Israelites to enjoy the protection of houses and roofs over their heads. From then on, they must live in tents until they reach the promised land. There is in this a lesson for spiritual Israelites who have started their pilgrim journey toward the heavenly Canaan of rest. There can be no “continuing city” which shall afford them protection from the hardships of the way as they presently journey. (Heb. 13:14) As spiritual sons of our Heavenly Father, travelling on towards the spiritual land of promise, we do not look to material sources for our protection. Instead, we each dwell in temporary, humble dwellings over which God watches, and we have the assurance that he neither slumbers nor sleeps. (Ps. 121:3,4) His precious promises of grace and protection for every time of need furnish a blessed canopy between us and the storms and fiery trials which otherwise would overwhelm us.—Heb. 4:16

The Israelites traveled under the canopy of a cloud provided by God. (Exod. 13:21,22) This might well remind us of the boundlessness of God’s grace with which we are surrounded and “that for those who love God, that is, for those who are called according to his purpose, all things are working together for good.” (Rom. 8:14-17,28, *International Standard Version*) This grace must not be hindered nor handicapped. No earthborn cloud should be permitted to come in between us and our God. We should be able to look up at all times to the covering of his grace and love and thus realize an ever-increasing sense of his mercy and care. We should remember, however, that God’s love and grace toward us are not always manifested merely in the

pleasant experiences of life. The trials and the sufferings that the Lord permits to come upon us are equally manifestations of his love. We need these experiences also in order to grow strong in him “and in the power of his might.”—Eph. 6:10

Take as an illustration two plants of the same kind. Let one be grown in the cellar, where light and fresh air are excluded; and let the other be grown in an open garden. After a few weeks note the difference between the two plants. One will be healthy and strong, the other weak and frail. The plant in the cellar is protected from the wind and the rain, but it is this very protection that prevents it from growing strong and hardy. On the other hand, the plant that is grown in the open air becomes strong in its struggles against the elements, being aided by the nourishment provided by the sun's radiance and the rain's vitalizing moisture. Under this great canopy of heaven, the plant thrives because of all the various elements and factors which contribute toward its development and strength.

True spiritual Israelites have experiences that encompass all of the phases of God's grace by which they grow up into Christ. This exposure is what really makes the faithful Christian strong. It is the adverse wind blowing upon a tree which causes it to become stronger and stronger as it shoots its roots correspondingly deeper in the earth. Yet it should be kept in mind that it is the sunshine that is the vital means of its sustenance and life, thereby affording it the ability to withstand the storms. We, too, grow strong through our resistance to the storms of life, yet it is by means of the sunshine of

God's favor that we are given the encouragement and ability to be faithful, even unto death.

The zeal with which the Israelites started their wilderness journey did not continue. In this we have a very vivid illustration of what may occur in our own individual experiences if we do not carefully watch ourselves. There is the possibility, even the danger, of losing our "first love." (Rev. 2:4) According to Numbers 33:6-8, the Israelites seemed first to have moved generally eastward, then suddenly they were directed to turn southward. The most natural thing for them to have done would have been to continue going east, for then would they have come to the little streams lying north of the Red Sea, which surely would have been much easier to cross and more directly in line with Canaan, their goal.

The Israelites' course seems to have been inconsistent, because instead of it increasing the distance between themselves and the domain of Pharaoh, they were actually shortening it. Not only so, but they were increasing the barrier between themselves and the promised land. However, the explanation is that this move was God-directed. The account reads, "And the LORD went before them ... to lead them the way."—Exod. 13:21

Following God's Direction

To spiritual Israelites there are many times when God directs, not in ways of progress according to the flesh, but in the very reverse direction, so that the demonstration of God's grace and power may be the greater. We must not choose our own way, but must ever let God direct our course, even though,

at times, this course seems most hazardous. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof" is not the full and complete deliverance for which we hope.—Prov. 14:12

If left to choose our own way we would be inclined to follow our natural tendencies and preferences. The way of the flesh is usually to follow the line of least resistance. However, in this way God cannot be glorified nor can our faith be properly demonstrated. It is easy thus to have faith while we can see the farther shore, but when the fogs set in, hindering our natural vision, then it is that we need to exercise strong faith in God.

To expand upon this illustration, when traveling by boat on a clear day of sunshine one may give little thought to the skill and competency of the pilot. Yet, when a thick fog sets in and the old, familiar landmarks are no longer visible, it is then that we appreciate the pilot and his ability to bring us safely to our desired haven. Under such circumstances there is nothing that one can possibly do except to put full trust in the pilot. Our uneasiness, nervousness, misgivings, doubting, and fretting would not help in the least—we must stand by in faith, while the pilot brings us through.

How true this is of our spiritual journey! There are times when, in the providences of God, we can do nothing to extricate ourselves from a difficult situation. At such times, there is nothing that we can do except to put our trust wholly in God, realizing that he is the one who is able to bring us through. (Ps. 34:19; II Cor. 1:9,10) It is then that our extremities become God's opportunities.

God brought the Israelites through an extremity in order that they might have an opportunity to "stand still" and see his salvation. (Exod. 14:13) He changed their course and brought them down to Pihahiroth. This was truly a place where, according to the flesh, their hearts would fail them for discouragement. Instead of finding their deliverance from Egypt complete, they found themselves in an apparently worse condition than when they first undertook the journey. Did they then remember the God who had already done so much for them? No. They murmured and cried. They saw only the Red Sea before them and the Egyptians behind them. They saw no way of escape because they neglected to put their trust in God.—Exod. 14:10-12

Perhaps we, too, as spiritual Israelites have reached our extremities and have seen before and behind us what appear to be insurmountable obstacles. The Lord may lead us, as it were, to the Red Sea, where every visible means of escape seems to be cut off. At such times do we fear and quake at the apparent impending doom? We should not, because it is here that God is afforded his great opportunity to give us deliverance. It is through these experiences that we learn the much-needed lesson that deliverance is not of ourselves but of God. It is at such times that he says to us as he did to Israel of old through his servant Moses, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD."—Exod. 14:13

It is at these times that God, if we let him, becomes our tower of refuge, our tower of strength. Literally speaking, how good it is when we have lost ourselves in the woods and no longer know our way out to suddenly see a familiar tower, marking

a spot, which, if we can but reach it, will mean safety for us. God is just such a tower of strength and deliverance, bringing salvation to us in our greatest times of need. (Ps. 61:1-3; Prov. 18:10) Without him we would be hopelessly lost in the wilderness of despair.

The account tells us that God directed the Israelites to Pihahiroth, "between Migdol and the sea." (Exod. 14:2; Num. 33:7) Migdol means "tower." How significant this is! It was here that God revealed himself to the Israelites as a tower of refuge. He instructed Moses what was to be done under the circumstances. Obedience to these instructions brought deliverance through the very sea that only a short time before had presented itself as a most impenetrable barrier to their escape. The cloud that went before them, now took its position at the rear of the camp, becoming a pillar of darkness to the Egyptians and a pillar of light to the Israelites, preventing the Egyptians from marching in upon them throughout the entire night. (Exod. 14:19-22) By morning, the Red Sea had opened up, and they passed through to safety.

Spiritual Israelites often have experiences permitted of God by which their faith is tested. These help us to learn the lesson, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Eph. 2:8,9) It is most important for us to realize that it is not by our own strength that we gain deliverance. It is very necessary that we, at times, "stand still" and see the salvation of God. This does not mean a listless or disinterested attitude, but it does mean calm confidence in him.

It is a confidence born of faith, that greater is he who is for us than all those who are against us. (Rom. 8:31; I John 4:4) By thus putting our confidence in God and cooperating with him as he directs our paths, victory and deliverance are assured.

To have full faith in God means that we will trust him under all circumstances. We will trust him when he says to stand still and we will trust and obey when he instructs us to move forward. Failure to move when the Lord gives us marching orders would manifest a lack of faith, as much as it would not to stand still when he asks us to do so. However, whether standing still or going forward at his command, our hearts should always be in repose, for we even now rest in the realization of his completed work. It is only thus that we can enter into the rest which is provided for us by faith in Christ Jesus. (Heb. 4:9-11) All our work for the Lord and all our progress in the narrow way should be based upon and in harmony with this quiet, trustful repose in him and his promises. These give us the assurance that no matter what may happen, all things are working together for our good. (Rom. 8:28) Thus in anticipation of the final end of the way, and the Canaan of rest that will be found there, we can, even now, amidst the strife and the difficulty of the way, give thanks to God, who "giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."—I Cor. 15:57 ■

*"I will teach you wisdom's ways and lead you
in straight paths."*

*"When you walk, their counsel will lead you.
When you sleep, they will protect you. When you wake
up, they will advise you."—Proverbs 4:11; 6:22*