

Our Journey So Far

“Nothing in Scripture is written in vain; it is our wisdom and duty to learn from it. Others have fallen, and so may we.” Matthew Henry

Or as we might say, “there but for the grace of God go I.” And God does deal graciously with us though we might sometimes forget that during times of trial. His very Word is an example of His grace towards us. He provided us with a detailed account of the Israelites and their failures, not to expose and shame them but rather as an admonishment to those who would follow - a heads-up to help us learn from them and avoid the same mistakes. If we are wise, we will learn what God is teaching us through this study and act on it.

Rather than getting right into the study this year, we began a little differently by first focusing on three things to consider before we embark on any journey. The first thing we need to acknowledge is that God is our provider for the journey and will be with us no matter where we go. Jeremiah 33:3 reminds us to *‘Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’* II Peter 1:3 says, *“His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.”* In other words, there is nothing we lack; He has provided everything we need and we should never doubt His provision.

The second area concerned preparing for a victorious journey. Hebrews 12:1 advises, *“let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...”* - we need to be willing to set aside things that slow us down and hinder us in following the Lord. Too many times we try to hold on to worldly things that God wants us to let go of. Our goal should be to put off the old man (the world) and be conformed to the image of Christ, always keeping in mind that we need a savior. To be victorious on our journey, we must be willing to rid ourselves of anything that prevents us from obeying God. We were encouraged to spend time in prayer asking the Lord, “What in my life is preventing me from living in the victories you have promised me?”

Finally, the third part was trusting the provision - realizing how much His provision surpasses anything we can do on our own. *“God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”* (Numbers 23:19) He keeps His word - we can't. He's God - we're not. It makes no sense that we would depend on ourselves more than we depend on Him. Yet, we often do. Our goal should be to trade our stuff for His; to surrender our will to Him.

We then joined the Israelites in Exodus 12. They had been in bondage to Egypt for 430 years. The conditions of their slavery had gotten progressively worse and they longed for freedom, begging God to send a deliverer. God chose Moses for the job and by this time, Moses had announced nine different plagues that would befall Egypt if Pharaoh refused to release Israel from their slavery. Pharaoh ignored God and refused to free the Israelites thus bringing nine terrible plagues on all of Egypt and hardening his heart more each time. Then came the tenth plague. The firstborn of every family from the palace to the dungeon died, regardless of position

or wealth. The only ones spared were those who had followed God's directions and covered their doorpost with the blood of the Passover lamb. In the Passover, we saw the foreshadowing of God's coming plan of redemption: Jesus, the unblemished lamb sacrificed on our behalf - His blood was shed for us, and covered us, so that death would "passover" us.

With the impact of the tenth plague, Pharaoh finally relented and ordered Moses to take the Israelites and leave. They left in a hurry, gathering their kneading bowls and unleavened bread on the way out. They had little else to take since the Egyptians had confiscated all of their belongings when they enslaved them. God instructed the Israelites to ask for articles of silver and gold plus clothing from the Egyptians as they fled and then He stirred the hearts of the Egyptians to generously comply. Thus God made provision for His children.

As they began their journey, God took them on a very different path than most would have chosen. He gave specific directions and they unquestioningly followed. He assured them of His continual presence - revealing Himself as a pillar of clouds in the day and a pillar of fire at night. They were never alone. Going into the unknown is not always easy, being unsure of what awaits you. That is when you must trust God even more, knowing He goes before you and prepares the way. We will never grow if we resist God's leading and stay in the security of the familiar. Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."* God will direct our steps.

At this point, the Israelites were trusting that God was speaking to Moses and they were willing to follow him into the unknown. But as two million people squeezed into the tiny area, they started to realize there was no place for them to go. God deliberately put them into this place of no escape, knowing their situation would "bewilder" them; they would be baffled and puzzled with no clue what to do. He also knew that the enemy would see Israel's predicament and plan to take advantage of it. It's not what any of us would have probably done but we must remember God's thoughts are not our thoughts nor His ways our ways. He always has a bigger and better plan - one that will be for our best and will bring glory to Him.

Seeing the end from the beginning, God knew Pharaoh would once again harden his heart. While Pharaoh plotted to outsmart Moses and once again enslave Israel, God put His plans in place. He would prove to Pharaoh and the Egyptians once and for all that He was God and there was no other. He would also show Himself strong on behalf of Israel so they would know He was the Lord.

As the shock and grief of the Egyptians and Pharaoh lessened, they realized what a big mistake they had made in letting Israel go. Their country was in a shambles after all of the plagues and their economy needed to be totally rebuilt but they had just freed their entire labor force and given away all their wealth. Imagine the impact of losing a million laborers plus millions of dollars in gold and silver. Hatred consumed the Egyptians as they planned to get their slaves and money back. God gave Pharaoh up to the passions of his own heart and hardened it even more. Pharaoh gloated as he saw Israel trapped and pridefully thought to show himself greater than the God of Israel. Pride goes before a fall!

There are times God allows us to be “trapped” - to close every possible avenue of escape but Him. Like Israel, He wants us to come to the end of ourselves and our resources and simply trust Him. We need to remember that He is the God of the impossible. Only He can make a way when there is no way!

As the Egyptian army drew nearer, the Israelites could see all of the horses, men, and chariots headed their way. There they were: mountains surrounding them on the right and left, the Red Sea directly ahead, and the advancing army approaching from the rear. They panicked - there was no way out! Once they grasped their predicament, fear immediately set in. Then it says they cried out unto the Lord. Finally, they went to their only source of help.

How often do we go to God for help as a last resort? We try to handle situations on our own and when our efforts fail, we finally seek God. His desire is that we come to Him right away, no matter how big or small the problem. He is waiting for us to call on Him for help.

One last lesson we have learned from Israel so far concerns what our response should be after we ask the Lord for help. We find the Israelites seeking God one minute and then complaining in the very next breath. How quickly they forgot how miserable their lives had been as slaves and how they had begged for deliverance. Suddenly they wanted to return to Egypt! Is our response to challenging situations any better? The saying “misery loves company” is all too true. We complain to others about our circumstances or complain because God doesn’t seem to be answering soon enough or in the way we wanted. Unfortunately, complaining does nothing to solve the problem! Numbers 11:1 warns, *“Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused.”* Complaining displeases the Lord and rouses His anger. In essence, when we complain we show a lack of trust in God and His ability to deliver us. In Exodus 14:13, Moses tells us how we should respond - *“Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.”* Stand still and wait for the Lord to move. In a crisis, that is much easier said than done. But as we stop and reflect on the Lord’s grace and mercy in our lives and remember the great things He has done for us in the past, our faith will grow stronger as we stand still and wait patiently for Him. Focus on Jesus - NOT on the circumstances!



*Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield.
Psalm 33:20*