

## **HUNGRY AND THIRSTY IN THE WILDERNESS**

For three days after God divided the waters of the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to escape from Pharaoh's army, they traveled in the wilderness without finding water.

They became desperate and grumbled against Moses.

Moses prayed to God for water, and soon they came to a place called Elim, "...where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees and they camped there near the water."

They were thirsty and the Lord provided the water they needed to stay alive.

Soon after that, they became hungry and grumbled against Moses again.

Moses prayed to the Lord for food and He sent down quail and manna.

They were hungry and the Lord gave them the food they needed to stay alive.

And for the next forty years the Lord continued to provide food and water to His people each day as he led them through the wilderness.

When the two things that sustain life become scarce, we begin to realize how precious they are.

That's how the Israelites felt about water and food during their journey through the wilderness.

It was always on their minds.

They craved the basics of life which only God could provide.

And God provided them.

And what applies to our physical well-being also applies to our spiritual well-being.

As children of God who live in a fallen world, we are traveling through a spiritual wilderness where our souls cry out for spiritual food and water that only God can provide.

The spiritual water we need to stay alive is the Holy Spirit of God and the spiritual food we need to stay alive is the Word of God.

The soul that is not watered and fed with the Spirit and Word of God withers and dies.

This is why the Exodus furnishes us with a perfect pattern for Christian living.

Before the Exodus, the children of Israel were slaves to the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses.

Then God sent Moses the deliverer to lead them out of their slavery.

After He had "baptized them" through the waters of the Red Sea He led them through the wilderness of Sinai to the promised land of Canaan.

During their forty years of wandering in the wilderness, He fed them every day with manna, bread from heaven, and provided with water from the rock that followed them, which, according to Paul, was the Spirit of Christ.

At times they fell into doubt, sin, rebellion and despair.

But in the end God led them across the Jordan River into the promised land of Canaan, a land of milk and honey which He had promised to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

In the same way, we, the children of Adam, started out as slaves—not to an Egyptian pharaoh, but to the sin and death that were our birthright.

Then God sent Jesus the Deliverer into our life and He led us out of slavery through baptism into the spiritual wilderness of this world where we follow Him to the Promised Land.

As we make our life-journey through the wilderness, we are nourished by God's Spirit and God's Word.

And like the Israelites, we too sometimes fall into doubt, sin, rebellion and despair.

But in the end, God delivers us through the dark rolling waters of death into the land he promised to all of those who follow Jesus: the New Jerusalem of God.

We celebrate this journey in the words of a hymn we will sing later today--  
“*When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside; death of death and hell’s destruction, land me safe on Canaan’s side.*”

The Exodus was the defining event in the history of Israel because it was where Israel was forged into a nation.

The Exodus is for Jews what the *Mayflower Compact*, the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution* all rolled together are for Americans.

That is why Moses, rather than Abraham, is regarded by the Jews as the “founding father” of Judaism.

And that is why a detailed record of the Exodus was painstakingly kept and preserved in the *Pentateuch*—the first five books of the *Old Testament*.

It is also why for over 3500 years Jews have faithfully celebrated the event which launched the Exodus—the Passover—when God shielded His children from the angel of death He sent to sweep over Egypt.

And it is also why when God speaks to the Israelites in the *Old Testament*, He refers to Himself as “...*the Lord your God who brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*”

And the same God who set the children of Israel free from slavery to the prince of Egypt, now sets the children of Adam free from slavery to sin, death and the prince of this world--Satan.

Long ago, God announced this mighty deliverance through the prophet Isaiah in the words of today’s *Old Testament* lesson.

If you read it carefully, you will notice that He used the language of Exodus to describe what He was going to do so as a sign that that one day He would provide a new Exodus for his people who would become a New Israel.

“Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert; the burning sand will become a pool and the thirsty earth a bubbling

spring...there will be a highway there—it will be called the way of holiness...”

The only difference was that this time his grace would be magnified: the New Exodus would be for ALL of Gods children, Jews and Gentiles alike.

So what can we learn from the old Exodus that will sustain us as we wander through the wilderness of this world during our New Exodus?

First of all, we can learn to live in this world like God instructed the Israelites to live in the wilderness of Sinai: as strangers in a strange land.

The church of New Israel, like the tabernacle of ancient Israel, needs to be **in** the world, but not **of** the world.

When the church takes on the colors of the world—when it becomes “world-friendly”—it begins to crave the food the world has to offer rather than the bread of heaven and the water of the Spirit.

The church's natural food is heavenly manna—the Word of God—and its natural drink is the Holy Spirit of God—not food sacrificed to the idols of a fallen world.

You might say that the church's job is to remain primitive and not become progressive.

Of course as long as the church does this it will provoke hostile reactions from the world around it, because the world is xenophobic: it hates and fears those who are aliens in it and who reject its ways.

That's why the true church is always the persecuted church.

In the *Book of Revelation*, John is given “...a great and miraculous sign in heaven,” a prophecy that Satan will relentlessly persecute the New Testament church until her King returns and casts him into the lake of fire.

We can also learn from the Exodus that the true church—like the tabernacle in the wilderness—will be a church that always follows God wherever he leads it, *even if that takes the church back to places where it has already been.*

If you drew a line that traced the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years, it would look convoluted and directionless to the human eye, looping back upon itself several times.

To the Israelites, their journey must have seemed like aimless wandering, But God led them where they needed to go, and God will lead His church exactly where it needs to go.

All we need do is follow Him.

We can also learn from the Exodus that God wants us to trust Him for everything we need *on a daily basis*.

Let me repeat that: God wants us to depend upon Him day by day for everything we need.

He wants to feed us day by day, forgive us day by day, and lead us day by day.

Each day of their forty-year journey, God gave the Israelites only enough manna for that day—except on the sixth day when he gave them enough for two days so that they could rest on the Sabbath.

If they tried to store up the manna, it rotted.

Each new day they broke camp in the morning and followed God to wherever He led them on that particular day.

They lived their lives in daily dependence upon Him for all their needs: food, water and direction.

He was their storehouse of food, clothing and shelter and he was their GPS.

*In other words, they lived their lives in faith.*

And Jesus urges those who follow Him to live their lives the same way. “Look at the birds of the air,” he said. “They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they?...Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.”

In Paul's words: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, take your requests to God. And the peace of

*God that surpasses all of our understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!"*

What a blessed life we can have if we learn to live like that!

If, instead of worrying about what's going to happen tomorrow or next week or next month or next year, we simply do each day's work and trust God for the future.

We would probably put all the psychologists out of business!

Finally we learn from the Exodus that God always—ALWAYS—delivers on his promises.

This too is called faith. There was only one thing that prevented the Israelites from reaching the promised land and it's the same thing that prevents people today from reaching the goal of their Christian Exodus: today.

It's called *unbelief*.

Now it's important to understand that unbelief is not merely the absence of belief.

Unbelief is the active rejection of the clear evidence of nature which proclaims that there is a God in heaven.

Unbelief is refusing to believe that God is angered by our sins and telling ourselves that He is merely bemused by them.

Unbelief is rejecting the clear testimony of Scripture that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, paid the penalty for our sins on the cross and rose again to give us eternal life.

Unbelief is preferring to rule in hell rather than serve in heaven.

In the final analysis, unbelief is saying to God: "**My** will be done," rather than, "**Thy** will be done."

Unbelief is an opinion from hell which snares its victims and drags them down to the pit.

Belief—or faith—on the other hand, is trusting God and His Word rather than our own sensibilities.

We are, by nature, slaves of the prince of this world and are inclined to believe his lies than God's truth.

In Paul's words, we "...see *through a glass darkly.*"

That's why believing God's word and letting it guide our lives can seem counter-intuitive and goes against our grain.

But God's Word and Spirit are true bread and true drink in a Christian's life.

And that is why here at Hope we celebrate the importance of Sunday School and adult Bible study.

The more we're nourished by God's Word and Spirit, the more we are drawn to Christ and want to follow Him down the path He has laid out for us.

God's Holy Spirit working through God's mighty word and incarnated in Jesus Christ, is the alpha and omega of Christian life.

*"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."*

Amen.

