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## THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

*All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Ex. 17:1*

One of the reasons most of us Christians have taken an extensive interest in the journey of the Children through the Wilderness is because we identify with their needs, concerns, and fears during their forty years of wanderings. Getting out under the heavy yoke of Egyptian bondage was one thing, but enduring a barren wilderness for forty years did raise questions in their minds as to whether they could survive such an ordeal as well. After all, in Egypt they did eat, but on the first leg of their journey after crossing the Red Sea, they questioned whether they would be able to do that.

Not everyone that left Egypt were true believers in God’s provision. We are told that a “mixed multitude” (Ex. 12:38) went up with the Children of Israel. Some, perhaps willing to leave their country, because it had been laid waste by the plagues (especially after seeing their first-born die). On the other hand the greater part of them was a group of rude, disgruntled people who probably just wanted to experience some form of change who never thought through what kind of change traveling with the Israelites would entail. It is likely, when they understood that the children of Israel were to continue forty years in the wilderness. This is why they kept bringing up the subject that they ought to return to Egypt every time something seemed to go wrong.

***This “mixed multitude” just wanted to get out of Egypt, but they had to make other plans beyond that.*** They represent a lot of people today who experience such restlessness of spirit. This is probably why people tend to move so often. I read recently that a person in the United States is expected to move 11.4 times in his lifetime. This is completely different from yesteryear when it was not uncommon for some married couples to live in the same dwelling for years even after they had raised their families.

Now I am not saying that all change is bad. It is evident that Israel needed a change, especially after 400 years. But for that change to take place they would need to experience some challenges, unlike the ones they experienced in Egypt. This is why I became fascinated with my passage that I chose for this article. For Israel to deal with the changes, God ordered special “stages” for that change. Note what the Scripture tells us: “All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages....” (ESV Translation)

They journeyed according to the commandment of the Lord, led by the pillar of cloud and fire, and yet they came to a place where there were needs. If you look at Exodus, chapter sixteen, you will see that the people began to grumble because there was no meat (Ex. 16:3) and therefore God had to supply them with a replacement which ended up being what the people called “manna” but the Lord called it bread. Now we come to chapter 17 and find that there was no water for them to drink – Once again God miraculously gave them water out of a rock (Ex. 17:6,7)

As Israel continued on their journey they would soon find that other problems would arise in which they would need to have access to the resources of God for their provision. But those needs would be different than merely bread and water. God wanted His people to be different and unique from all of the other nations of the earth. So He called them out of Egypt and took them on a journey to bring about a change in them.

I am sure that when Israel saw that there was no water to drink it was a very frightening thought, especially when they looked around them and saw this vast multitude. Even if you had a jug or two for the family, what happens when the neighbors find out you have water? It could be very frightening. So when the last of their water skins fail them and they are exhausted, the people's grumblings soon reached the ear of Moses.

***Again, I want to remind my readers, God lead His people through stages.***

This was one of those stages. Most people can bear one stage but when you add to that one stage and another, and then another, after while it mounts up to a mountain of troubles that some people have a hard time dealing with. They become exhausted by the stages. Most people can handle one day of evil, but the thing that breaks one down however is when the one day turns into two, three, or four to twenty, then to an hundred.

**All the time of Israel's journey, they were led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.** In other words, God was leading them through their stages. All that Israel needed to do was to be led and thus keep following the Lord's direction and eventually He would lead them to the Promised Land. The only way they could survive the wilderness was to trust the Lord in following His cloud and trusting in Him for His provision. They would not make it on their own. God would need to make up the difference in their time of lack.

***I believe what these passages of Scripture reveal is something for each of us.*** We too keep going through the various stages of life. We may not have gone through the part of having no food or water, yet the needs that have arisen may have caused an equal concern in your life. I know that I can confess of having such desperate measures in my own life at times. But this one thing I can testify -- God is faithful. I wish that I could say that I didn't complain...because my wife could testify that I have...but in spite of it all, somewhere we have learned that God can bring us through these various stages in our lives if only we can learn to trust Him.

God calls each of us to various challenges in life. When we were young we had to arise to meet certain challenges such as in choosing a career, marriage, having children, etc. Then our life moved on to other types of challenges, such as changing a job, furthering one's education, taking on extra responsibilities, getting involved in church activities as well as community involvement.

Then we have health challenges, or maybe we have members of our extended family that need help. This list can get pretty big at times, then comes old age. We face each day with challenges that we only heard about but never came to experience prior. But we soon learn that it is only another stage in life in which God wants to be real to us and show us that just as He was of help to the Israelites, He also wants to help us as well.

I read recently that older people who get out of the house regularly are generally blessed with longer life. And the effect is independent of medical problems or mobility issues. For study participants in their 70s, 80s, and 90s, the frequency with which they left the house predicted how likely they were to make it to the next age milestone, researchers report in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society.

So if we really think about it, maybe all that the Lord wants to do is get us out of the house so that we can live longer and experience more fullness in life. I find that people who are engaged in some activity from time to time are healthier, happier, and are the producers in this life. We need people who live for something other than their own needs, worries and concerns. We need people who find joy in serving others.

Yes, we are all on a journey of some kind. We have a choice to make. We can either use this time in our life to complain about our aches and pains, and how bad things are or we can see our time as an opportunity to see the hand of God in our lives. God's Spirit is still moving the cloud in our lives...He is still directing those people who are called by His name. He wants to lead us into greener pastures and restore our souls....but we must be willing to get out of the house and start the journey.

Amen