

Journey Into God's Word



Exodus 16-24

Psalms 73-89

Acts 8-15

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Please don't worry, God is faithful and will provide for your daily needs, as you trust in Him. As you study God's word, you will see how God daily provided for the children of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness. As you read of their journey it is easy to say, "What's wrong with those people, why did they doubt God as He daily provided manna and even quail? After all, didn't He also guide them by day with a cloud and at night with a pillar of fire? How could they not believe?" The answer is they became so focused on their immediate need for water and other things that they started grumbling and put God to the test. They forgot God's promise to provide for them.

The fact is that we are not that different. The pressing needs of the moment often seem so great that we fail to see beyond them. The tyranny of the urgent causes great memory losses of God's faithfulness in the past and His promises for the future. Notice how this happened in the lives of the children of Israel as they traveled through the wilderness in Exodus 16 - 18 and Psalm 78. "How often they rebelled against Him in the desert and grieved Him in the wasteland. Again and again they put God to the test, they vexed the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power - the day He redeemed them from the oppressor." (Psalm 78: 40-42).

What does verse 33 of Psalm 78 say is the result of those who doubt God? Do you want to wander in the wilderness of futility and terror for the next 40 years or do you want the Sovereign Lord your refuge? (Psalm 73: 28) “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it”. (Psalm 81: 10). There is power in prayer. No matter what “Egypt” God may have brought you out of, He wants you to know He will provide for you. As you read Psalms 73 – 89, note the Psalmist’s struggle and how in each case He declares His trust in God. In Psalm 84: 5 –7, we read “Blessed are those whose strength is in You, who has set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.” Do you know what this is saying to you now? The Valley of Baca means the Valley of Tears. Growing strong in God’s presence often means a journey through the barren places of tears and loneliness in life. The person who is abiding in the reality of God’s presence sees those difficult times as opportunities to experience God’s faithfulness. The psalmist says “Blessed are those whose strength is in God.” Where are you drawing your strength? Is it from God or you? If it is the Lord then you can know that “the Lord is a sun and shield the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless.” (Psalm 84:11)

There is tremendous power in prayer. As you read Acts 8-15, notice how prayer preformed a mighty role in the expansion of the early church. For example, in Acts 12 we read that Peter is in prison. In verse 12, we read that many people had gathered and were praying. What happened as a result of their prayers? How did it happen? In Acts 10:4 we read that an angel told Cornelius “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come as a memorial offering before God.” What happened to Cornelius and those who were with him who heard Peter’s message?

What about those who are sincerely praying and seeking God but do not know that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved? (Act 15:11) The story of Cornelius' salvation also shows how one who is praying and sincerely seeking God will have someone come to them with the Gospel. Acts 10 shows us how Peter, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, came to Cornelius, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Will you also be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit as He directs you to share Jesus with others? Why was Ananias at first reluctant to go and pray with Saul? (Acts 9: 12, 14) What happened after he went? (Acts 9:17-19) Pride will hinder the flow of the Spirit in our lives. What happened to Herod when he gave in to pride in (Acts 12: 21-23)? What did Paul and Barnabas do when the crowd wanted to treat them like gods in Acts 14: 11-18? Notice how they shared the Gospel with the crowd, telling them to "turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made Heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, He let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left Himself without testimony. He has shown kindness, by giving you rain from Heaven and crops in their season. He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." (Acts 14: 15 -17) How does James in Acts 15:16-18 point out that the Gospel is for all people? How is it that Sergius Paulus came to know Christ in Acts 13:6-13? Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ often involves suffering. Chosen instruments of the Lord through whom He works in a mighty way often go through much suffering. (Acts 9:16) What suffering did Peter and Paul experience in Acts 8-15? Look at Philippians 3:8-10 and see what Paul really valued in life. Perhaps at this moment, along with the Psalmist, you are crying out, "How long, O Lord?" Look at Ps. 79:5, Ps. 82:2, Ps. 90:46 and describe how the Psalmist finds relief in the midst of those cries for help. I know that a touch of the reality of God's love can change everything. "Show me your unfailing love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation." (Ps. 85:7) Take a look at Ps. 77 for some practical tips on dealing

with distress. We see that in verse 4 the source of the Psalmist's distress is his doubt. (Ps. 77:7-9). He pled, "I cried out to God for help". (Verse 1) Then in Verse 13 something changes. The "I" is gone. As the Psalmist called upon the Lord, his focus shifted from self to God. "You are the God who performs miracles." (Ps. 78:14) Only as he put aside his doubts about God's love for him did he get rid of his depression. (Ps. 78:13, 14) As we shift our fears from ourselves to God, the "how long, O Lord" changes to "praise the Lord!" Such praise allows God to take over, freeing us from worry to enjoy the reality of His love. This praise is a natural response to those who believe the fact that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16) The certainty of this good news brings us hope, even in the most desperate of situations.

We are talking about a New Covenant relationship, which supercedes the Old Covenant of the Old Testament. Paul goes into detail on this in the book of Galatians, particularly in Galatians 5:1-6. In verse 6, he declares, "the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." That being the case, then why should we even study the Old Testament law, tabernacle, feasts, etc.? The reason is that if these are studied correctly, they can help us gain a new appreciation for the completed work of Jesus on the cross. For example, in Ex. 12:1-36 we read of the Passover Lamb. I Cor. 5:7,8 says, "For Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth." Acts 8:32 says that Jesus "is brought as a lamb to the slaughter." The Passover tells us of Israel's deliverance from captivity and death as the angel of death passed over, killing the firstborn of the Egyptians. The firstborn of the Israelites were not killed because a lamb had been slain and the blood put on the two sideposts and over the door of every house. Jesus is our Passover Lamb. "He is the

atonement sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:2) “Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath.” (Romans 5:9)

In Exodus 19-24 we see the giving of the law. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.” This is not a contradiction of what Paul said earlier, but a declaration by Jesus that His love goes far beyond the requirements of the law. That’s why we can’t ignore the 10 Commandments found in Exodus 20. The love of Jesus Christ compels us to obey them. We do this, not because we are saved as a result of the law, but because of our love for Jesus who has saved us. We are like those Hebrew slaves, whom in Exodus 21:5,6 loved their master and chose to be servants for life. As we read the different penalties for sin, we recognize that the penalty of death has already been paid by Jesus Christ and that Jesus has come to give us life. This means when we read in Genesis 9:6 “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. For in the image of God has God made man,” that the death penalty, as it is imposed today by corrupted courts, has been done away with by Jesus Whose blood has been shed. That’s why when He stopped the execution of the woman caught in adultery, He said “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.” Psalm 79:11 says, “May the groans of the prisoners come before you; by the strength of your arm preserve those condemned to die.” Jesus summed up the law by declaring, “Love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this, love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12: 29-31)

If you are doing this, you will obey the 10 commandments. You will not murder out of a fear of death, but you will love because Christ’s love has come to live in you.

Exodus 23: 2 says, “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong.” In Exodus 24:7, we see Moses took the book of the covenant (Exodus 20:23), read it to the people and they responded, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.” This covenant was a blood covenant where ½ the blood of a sacrificed animal was sprinkled on the altar and the remainder sprinkled on the people, binding them to the laws of God. When Jesus introduced the new covenant (Mark 14: 24 and Hebrews 7: 22-27) we are assured that Jesus is God’s guarantee of an even better covenant. Instead of the sacrifice being repeated over and over as Hebrews 9:12 says, Jesus’ death is the one sacrifice necessary “once for all by His own blood, having obtained redemption.”

Because of this redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ, we now celebrate the feast of the Unleavened Bread, (Exodus 23:15) as a daily event in our lives. This means we celebrate because Jesus has freed us from the “leaven” of sin and we strive daily to be more and more like Him. We now also celebrate the “Feast of the Harvest” (Ex. 23:16) by daily surrendering ourselves to Him as the first fruits. This feast is also called Pentecost when we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As we let the Holy Spirit work in us daily, we become the first fruits of Christ. “He chose to give us truth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all He created.” (James 1:18) The third feast we celebrate daily under the Holy Spirit’s direction is the “Feast of Ingathering” (Exodus 23:16) We see this wonderful work of evangelism expressed in our reading in Acts. Daily going forth through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, we are gathering lost souls in this harvest unto the hope, life and heaven that Jesus provides.

As we move forward day by day under the leading of the Holy Spirit, let us not fear, instead let us pray and trust God. Let us believe His promises and the fact that He is telling us, “See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along

the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.”
(Exodus 23:20)

This week as we move forward by faith, will you join in reading Exodus 25-40, Psalms 90-101, and Acts 16-21? I am looking forward to sharing with you next week many exciting things about how the tabernacle points us to Christ and how the other Scriptures we are reading together will help us to be “more than conquerors through Christ who strengthens us.”

Yours in Christ service,

Larry Rice