**WANDERING, DEUT. 8, PROV. 3:5-6, HEB. 12:11, OCT. 2/22.**

God determined to build a great nation—a promise He kept. The nation-building began through Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, whose 12 sons became the forefathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. Joseph, Jacob’s 11th son, though given up for dead, survived & thrived when he was sold by his brothers as a slave in Egypt. He in turn was able to save his brothers during a great famine, but subsequent generations of the 12 Jewish tribes ended up in slavery in Egypt.

It became Moses’ destiny to free the Israelites under the dramatic hand of God. The Angel of death “passed over” the Hebrew families but killed the 1st born of all Egypt, so Pharaoh finally let God’s people go. They crossed the Red Sea on dry land into Sinai. In the desert God ordered a tabernacle, a tent of meeting where He met with Moses. It was where the Ark of the Covenant rested while the Israelites were stationary. A pillar of cloud hung over it by day & it became a pillar of fire by night. So God was never out of the sight of the Israelites. God estab-lished rules & laws for right living, central among them the 10 Commandments. Though people tried to keep them, they could not. It was God’s point that they could not maintain their own righteousness, but required the sacrifice of the coming Lamb of God to atone for their own sinfulness. As God delivered the Israelites from bondage & certain death, so He’s delivered each of us who have believed in Jesus Christ, from bondage to sin & the certain death sin demands.

Despite God’s grace, giving the Israelites (& us) what they didn’t deserve, God’s people grumbled repeatedly against Moses—really it was grumbling against God—so much that God didn’t want to go with them into the Promised Land. But Moses objected, saying, “Lord, if Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us…What else will distinguish…Your people from all the other people…?” We all need to appeal to God to go with us every day. When we invite Jesus into our lives, He does that as the Holy Spirit settles in us & we be-come the temple of the Holy Spirit. God’s new nation would be different, so the world would know the 1 true God, the source of all life & hope! God was on the move! & He’s on the move with us!

But the grumbling continued. “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions & garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna.” You’d think they’d been staying in the 4 Seasons Sheraton, instead of being locked in slavery at the merciless hands of the Egyptians! People tend to look back on “the good old days” as the “golden days”. Jesus said, “No one who puts his hand to the plow & looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” Do you hearken back to the glory days? God wants you to move forward with gratitude & a fresh heart.

The Lord became angry, & Moses was troubled. He complained to God that he couldn’t carry all these people by himself; “the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how You are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me…” Have you ever felt like that? The demands of people around you are overwhelming. What’s wrong with that picture? God never asked Moses to take this on Himself. God promised to lead the Israelites, using Moses as His chosen leader. When you experience such times, keep giving it back to God; stop wrestling it from Him!

Be careful what you ask God for. Even Moses doubted: would they have enough (even) if all the fish in the sea were caught for them? The Lord’s answer is strong: “Is the Lord’s arm too short?” Never! The people grumbled for meat, & got it until it came out their nostrils. The quail was 3’ deep a day’s walk in any direction. What would that smell like? How many feathers did they inhaled? Why was God so angry? “Because you have rejected the Lord, who is among you.” Whining & grumbling is rejecting God’s sufficiency, saying His provision isn’t enough.

Moses’ troubles weren’t just with the crowd; his own siblings spoke against him, saying the Lord had also spoken through them. Uh oh! God called them out; when He’d so clearly revealed Himself through Moses, why weren’t they afraid to speak against him? God left Miriam leprous for 7 days of disgrace; Aaron confessed the sin they’d so foolishly committed. Have you been there—when even your family turns on you/doesn’t believe you or demeans your efforts and intentions? That’s a tough place to be. Rest assured that God sees your pain & isolation.

Next, God tells Moses to send men to explore Canaan & report back. The land was exceedingly fertile—after all, God was leading them to the Promised Land. But when they returned after 40 days, they reported the Israelites couldn’t take the occupiers because they were stronger, & the Israelites looked like grasshoppers to them; they spread a bad report. But Caleb said, “We should go & take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” So what did the Israelites do? All night the community grumbled & wept. “If only we’d died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? We should choose a leader & go back to Egypt.” Moses & Aaron fell facedown; Caleb & Joshua tore their clothes & repeated, “If the Lord is pleased with us, He will lead us into the land…” The assembly wanted to stone them. Again, the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting before everyone. Guess what He said? “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in Me in spite of all the signs I have performed…?”

40 is important: the rain during the Great Flood lasted 40 days, Jesus fasted 40 days, the

Hebrews are wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. It represents fullness of what is to be experienced. Though the Israelites experienced the fullness of what could be offered in the Promised Land, they chose not to believe God would deliver it. We have the promise that God, through Jesus, will call us home to the real Promised Land of eternity & peace with God, yet we live as if it won’t happen, pouring far too much into this life. All we do should be better preparing us for the next life, not for our greater comfort here. Listen to Caleb: “We should go up & take the land, for we can certainly do it.” This is God’s promise! Let Him lead you there!

Moses pleaded that God would forgive them. God’s reply is in the past tense.

“I have forgiven them.” But “as surely as I live & as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not 1 of those who saw my glory & the signs I performed in Egypt & the wilderness…will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors…But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit & follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land…& his descendants will inherit it.”

Other than Caleb & Joshua, no one 20 or older lived to go into the Promised Land. That is why a 3 week journey from Egypt to Canaan lasted 40 years. God requires that we follow Him wholeheartedly; not a little here & a little there, or just for 1 hour every Sunday morning.

40 years later, with almost all of the eyewitnesses of the Lord’s signs in Egypt now dead, the grumbling continues. The glory of the Lord again appears at the tent of meeting & God tells Moses to assemble the people. “Take the staff,…Speak to the rock before their eyes & it will pour out its water.” But listen to how this went so wrong. Moses said, “Listen, you rebels, must we (Aaron & I) bring you water out of this rock?” Really? Since when did Moses have the power, authority or ability to do that? He only had to speak to the rock; God would do the rest. To add insult to injury, Moses raised his arm & struck the rock twice with his staff. God honoured His Word with the gushing water, but this cost Moses. “Because you didn’t trust in Me enough to honour Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.” All we need to do is the same; speak to the rock. That rock is Jesus Christ. When we do, abundant life will pour out from us quenching our spiritual thirst & cleansing us.

After Aaron died, the grumbling returned. God sent venomous snakes & many Israelites died. The people confessed their sin & God provided a way out, telling Moses to make a bronze snake & put it on a pole. When anyone was bitten & looked at the bronze snake, they lived. Jesus used this reference for Himself. Just as the snake must be lifted up, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that those who look on Him may be saved. Yes, look to Jesus for deliverance.

As the Israelites approached the Promised Land, nation after nation resisted them. With the Lord’s leading, each was defeated. One very bizarre situation involved Balak, king of Moab, who called on a pagan diviner, Balaam, to curse the Israelites. Balaam was caught between Balak’s promise of wealth if he cursed the Israelites & God’s command not to curse them. On the way to Moab the donkey not only refused to move, it suddenly talked, objecting to being whipped. Then the donkey told Balaam to open his eyes & see why he wouldn’t budge; Balaam saw the angel of the Lord opposing him in the road. What would you have done? It gave Balaam the courage to tell Balak what God wanted him to hear. Israel would be blessed & Moab would be cursed. I love this passage! It would be easier to leave it out; it’s right up there with marching around a walled city 7 times & blowing a trumpet so the walls would collapse, or that Jesus told Peter to go fishing & he’d catch a fish that had a 4 drachma coin in it to pay Peter’s & Jesus’ taxes. It seems absurd. But God is God over creation; it's no big thing for Him to do the super-natural. If anything, it makes the Scriptures more believable, not less.

The Israelites were sexually immoral with Moabite women & subsequently sacrificed to & bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked itself to Baal worship. The Lord’s anger burned against them. This is a checkpoint for us to. Are we worshiping anything other than holy God?

We come to Moses’ valedictory speech:

“The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands…you’ve lacked nothing…Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth;…Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, & lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself 1 nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs & wonders, by war, by a mighty hand & an outstretched arm, or by great & awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord you God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? You were shown these things so that you might know that the Lord is God; besides Him there is no other …Be-cause He loved your ancestors & chose their descendants after them, He brought you out of Egypt by His Presence & His great strength to drive out before you nations greater & stronger than you & to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance …Keep His decrees …which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you & your children after you & that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time.” (Deut. 4:32-40).

“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these 40 years, to humble & test you…to know what was in your heart, whether…you would keep His comm-ands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger [then fed] you with manna…to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

Every one of us must go through the wilderness—times of doubting God, even in His very presence; times of grief, times of emptiness & heartbreak; times where you just can’t function. But the good news is that by His grace, God will lead you through & out of the wilderness. God has given us this shared heritage & has put His exclamation mark on it with Jesus Christ. Our time is filled with the same outstretched arm. Too many signs & wonders to count, we are blessed in all the work of our hands & we lack nothing. He is readying us & bringing us into His promised land. Receive Christ & know that assurance. You can count on it! As always, share this with others this week.