

Returning to Egypt

Lesson Text: Numbers 14:1-5

INTRODUCTION:

- A. The Lord God had brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt as He had promised centuries before (Gen. 15:13-14).
1. Israel had seen the parting of the Red Sea and had crossed it on dry ground (Exodus 14:22).
 2. They had seen the destruction of the Egyptian army and had rejoiced (Exodus 14:27-30).
 3. They had heard the voice of God at Mount Sinai and had received His law (Exodus 20).
 4. They had been fed by His provision (Exod. 16:12ff) and watered by His power (Exodus 17:3-6).
 5. They had been victorious in battle and they knew it was the Lord's doing (Exodus 17:8-13).
- B. With these blessings and signs and much more had the children of Israel been blessed. Yet, when God required the completion of the final task, that of conquest, they stopped cold (**Numbers 14:1-5**). They proved something about themselves. Despite the heartache and pain, the slavery and humiliation, their hearts were still in Egypt.

And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

Many in the Lord's church have come out of denominations and have obeyed the truth in order to become members of the body of Christ. Others worshipped nothing but themselves, that is, they lived in and for pleasure. They heard the

truth about their soul's condition and were washed (1 Cor. 6:11). They appear to be headed for "the promised land" until the road gets rough or the Lord makes demands they are not willing to obey. It is then that they "return to Egypt."

Three obstacles are on my mind that apply especially to Christians in this century. These three obstacles have derailed many Christians en route to the "promised land." There are certainly others but these will be our focus.

EVANGELISM

The Gospel is believed and obeyed with joy. Then begins the slow assimilation process. The songs are learned, basic Bible knowledge is gained, the habit of attendance is cultured. Basic service is offered (Help around the building, assist teaching a class, prepare the Lord's supper, etc.). Then the preacher gives a sermon on evangelism.

With every good sermon one of two things happens. A heart is molded to the will of God or it is hardened. There is no middle ground. Eventually a heart gets so hard that it can't be molded anymore. The hardening process starts when a demand of God comes into contact with a stubborn heart (Exod. 7:13-14).

It is no different with evangelism. Jesus says "Go!" (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47) The hard heart says, "No!" The result is a lukewarm Christian (Rev. 3:16) whose heart dwells fully in "Egypt." This Christian may spend the rest of his days warming a pew and even providing nominal service to the Lord but will never hand out a tract, teach a Bible lesson, grade a correspondence course, support a missionary, or do any of the multitudes of things that one can do to spread the Gospel. He may sever all affiliation with the Lord's church. He looks at the task and sees "the sons of Anak" (Num. 13:23) and forgets the Lord's promise to be with us (Matt. 28:20). Oh for more like Caleb who will stand and say, "Let us go up at once, ... for we are well able to overcome it (Num. 13:30)."

When we stand with hard hearts and say no to God's command we will not enter into the promised land. God didn't put up with disobedience in the children of Israel, what makes us think He will put up with it in us? We will be judged by the words of Christ (John 12:48). Consider these words of Christ: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, (Matt. 28:19)" "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15)." "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47)." This is the demand of our Lord on the Christian. We simply must find a way to do it. We must either mold our will to it

or our hearts will be hardened. Pay close heed to the consequences of disobedience:

Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest (**Heb. 3:9-11**).

CHILDREN.

Next comes a sermon on the rearing of children. We learn that we have the responsibility to train and discipline our children (Eph. 6:4). We must teach them to be modest in dress, obedient to parents, students of the Bible and faithful attenders of worship. They are to be taught to be sober, respectful and good citizens. Some parents think about it and say, "If I do what the preacher says (No, its what the Bible says.) my child won't be prepared to live in this modern world." The fact is that many of the activities that children are allowed to be involved in come in direct conflict with Biblical teaching. It is becoming rare to find a sport where your son or daughter can dress modestly, especially the daughters. Little league games are often on Wednesday night. Parents reason that teens must go to the prom (with all its attendant evils) so that they will learn social graces. Some parents even teach their children how to "drink responsibly."

Once again the commands of God come into conflict with a heart that refuses to be molded. Some wonder why children leave the church. Children have learned what's important from their parents. I don't wonder anymore. The parents hearts have "returned to Egypt." They have taken their children's hearts with them.

MARRIAGE.

The courageous Gospel preacher then takes up the subject of marriage (You'd better believe it takes courage.). It is explained how that God hates divorce (Mal. 2:14-16). That marriage was intended to be for life (Matt. 19:4-6) and there is only one reason for divorce (Matt. 19:9). It is then explained that many are "married" to spouses they cannot be married to and go to heaven. If heart hardening were visible you could watch it do so rapidly here. "But I was so young when I married the first time." "But what about the children?" "Surely God didn't intend for me to be celibate." "That's just your interpretation." "You mean I have to break up my family?" The questions and loop-hole finding degenerate from there. If you're in adultery God does expect you to repent. Accompanying repentance there are always fruits worthy of repentance (Matt. 3:8), that is, stop sinning. Does God expect me to break up the family? Let's

go to an Old Testament example. In Ezra 9-10 we find that many in the nation of Judah had taken "strange wives." God had legislated that Judah was not to take wives from certain nations that bordered Judah, but they did anyway. To compound matters there were children from these unions. Ezra found out and there was but one remedy that repentance required.

Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. **Ezra 10:3**

Many here believe God's remedy is too harsh. Let it be remembered, though, that God didn't do it. Sinful man did.

It's either onward to the "promised land" or "return to Egypt." Many will find a more liberal "church" that will look the other way. It doesn't change the fact that they have "returned to Egypt."

"Returning to Egypt" or returning to bondage is not just an Israelite problem. It happens in our congregations every day. The hardening of the heart causes a soul to be lost. It is a matter of the will. Will you obey the Lord or won't you? Sometimes it's difficult. Sometimes it doesn't seem right by the world's standards. Obedience is the only path to the "promised land." We are commanded, "Harden not your hearts . . . (**Hebrews 3:9**).

CONCLUSION:

A. We have all seen people turn back to Egypt.

B. We must go forward in faithfulness.

C. **God's Plan for Man's Salvation**