

It is one thing to get the Israelites out of Egypt but how do you get Egypt out of the Israelites? God's people lived in Egypt for 400 years. When they finally broke free, they couldn't get Egypt off their minds or out of their hearts. In every generation, the values of the prevailing culture pose a threat to a life of obedience. Cultural values often contradict God's values. Our culture values self, God values selflessness. Our culture values status, God values humility. Our culture values wealth, God values generosity. So how can we break free of our old way of life?

God gave Israel a 40-year time out. They wandered in the wilderness as part of a customized de-Egyptianization program. There were some things they needed to forget and some things they needed to remember before they entered the Promised Land. If they would pursue God's will in God's way and in God's time, they would live out their God-given purpose. If not, they would wander aimlessly until they died in the desert. They had a few things to learn about the God of Abraham.

**1. Our God is a way-maker.** As they entered the Promised Land, God instructed His people to memorialize His gracious intervention so that future generations would know that God can make a way when there is no obvious way. The Israelites came through hell and high water to get to the Promised Land...Josh. 4:19-24. How would they know what these stones meant? Their fathers would explain it to them. They didn't go to a Levitical priest and ask. They didn't learn about it in Sabbath School. It was the responsibility of fathers to teach their children. Dads, have you ever shared your faith story with your children?

A modern example of telling your story is found on the dedication page of a book written by Haddon Robinson and his son Tory. Haddon writes to his son,

*Almost a hundred and fifty years ago, in Northern Ireland, your great-great-grandfather staggered home drunk past a church where they were singing an old hymn:*

*There is life for a look at the crucified one.*

*There is life at this moment for thee.*

*Look sinner look unto him and be saved,*

*Unto him who died on the tree.*

*Look, look, look and live*

*To him who died on the tree.*

*Hearing the words of that hymn, your great-great-grandpa surrendered his life to Christ and became a lay preacher. All his children became Christians. By God's grace, that story, that faith was passed on to your great-grandfather, to your grandfather, and then to your father. Now that story has become your story. It is our prayer that your children and your grandchildren may know the truth of that story as they see it lived out in you.*

**2. Our God is a time-taker.** One of the most challenging aspects of the Christian life is the realization that my timing is not God's timing. The Israelites had the Caananites and Amorites right where they wanted them...5:1. This is the time to strike, when your opponent is on his heels. But that's not what happens...5:2-7.

Why was this delay necessary? Why was circumcision so important? Circumcision was rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant, a contract guaranteeing the continuation of Abraham's seed and their permanent possession of the land (Gen. 17:7-8). In Acts 7:8, Stephen, in his speech before the Jewish authorities, declared that God "gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision" (Acts 7:8). Circumcision was the "sign" or symbol of that contract (Gen. 17:11). Through the normal course of everyday life, several times a day, a Jewish man was reminded that he bore the mark of the covenant. Israel needed to remember who they were and what they were about.

Why hadn't Israel circumcised their children in the wilderness? Their fathers had been spiritually indifferent. They argued with God. They questioned God. They disobeyed God. Now, as an act of consecration, hundreds of thousands of men and boys would be circumcised. It was a terrible inconvenience! God values obedience over success. We want to experience a victorious Christian life. But this passage reminds us that God puts a higher priority on the obedient Christian life. You can be victorious and lose in God's eyes. You can be successful and still be a failure if you are disobedient to God's commands. If Israel drives out the inhabitants of the land but they completely miss the point of why God sent them there, they lose. So do we. If we are successful in the world's eyes but we are indifferent to the purposes of God or have no clue about our ultimate purpose, we lose too.

You cannot be a Christian without being circumcised. In the NT we learn that every Christian is "circumcised" in Christ, not an outward, physical circumcision but an inward spiritual circumcision of the heart at the time of salvation when the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ. "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead."

Paul goes on to say that at that time, our sinful nature is judged. <sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." Col. 2:11-15

My old nature which is opposed to God will remain with me my whole life but just as Israel was set free from their slavery in Egypt I have been set free of my bondage to those old sinful patterns. I must treat my old carnal nature as a judged and condemned enemy.

**3. Our God is a chain-breaker.** There was another oversight on the part of the Israelites in the wilderness. They had forsaken the Passover meal. Joshua 5:10. They had not been able to celebrate Passover for a simple reason - only those who were circumcised could eat of the Passover. <sup>47</sup> All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. <sup>48</sup> If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. <sup>49</sup> There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you." Ex. 12:47-49.

The Passover meal was celebrated as a way to remember the purpose of God - to set people free from bondage to this world so we can be His chosen instruments of righteousness. Notice that Ex. 12 makes it clear that Israel was a "mixed multitude." In other words, the one true God was always ready to accept anyone from any tribe, nation or tongue who would recognize Him as the only true God.

The Passover, like the parting of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, was another example of the hand of God making a way for the people of God. The only people who escaped the judgment of God were those who put the blood of the lamb above the door of their house. There may have been some who thought, "That's a pretty crazy idea. How can a little dried blood save us?" But God's ways are not our ways and He will provide a way. God set the people free in His way and in His time.

Once they observed the Passover, no more manna...5:11-12. Manna was not only a reminder of God's miraculous provision but it was also a reminder of the constant temptation to return to Egypt. Even though God provided manna from Heaven, they constantly longed for the food of Egypt. Once the people crossed the river, the manna ceased. No looking back now.

**4. Our God is Master and Commander.** At the end of chapter 5 the scene shifts from a wide-angle perspective of 2 million people camped at Gilgal observing Passover to a close-up of Joshua looking up toward the fortified walls of the city of Jericho. Dt. 1:28 says the city had "walls up to the sky." (NIV). "Israel's army had no siege engines, no battering rams, no catapults, and no moving towers. Their only weapons were slings, arrows, and spears—which were like straws against the

walls of Jericho." (BKC). Joshua 5:13-15 describes his personal encounter with the Master and Commander of the Lord's army. Joshua says in effect, "Halt, who goes there? Are you friend of foe?" "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"<sup>14</sup> And he said, "No (or "neither") but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped." The Commander of the Lord's army didn't come to fight for Joshua or for Israel. He came to take charge of the campaign and to fulfill His promise to Abraham. This was God's battle and Joshua was to prepare himself spiritually because the real battle is not against flesh and blood "but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. To be spiritually unprepared is to be unarmed.

The Israelites were entering a land where the people enlisted their own gods to fight for their side. But the Lord of all the earth doesn't have a "side." When you are invited over to someone's home for dinner you don't walk in and start telling them what to prepare. You are a guest and you eat what you are served. The Promised Land was God's land. It was the place He had chosen from which to bless the world.

Some of us don't move forward in our Christian lives because we keep going back to Egypt and asking God to bless us in the process. We choose the flesh pots of Egypt over the manna from heaven. We choose to complain about the state of the world rather than worship and praise the God of the universe. We choose the many cultural "gods" and "saviors" over following Jesus. At the end of this book, Joshua will leave us with a choice, "Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD...choose this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Josh. 24:14-15.

God will make a way, in His own time. He will break the chains of your past. Choose Christ, the Commander of the Lord's army, and move out.