



# BEYOND the VEIL

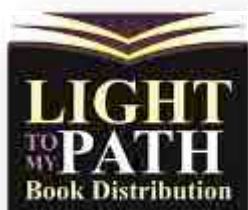
A OLD TESTAMENT CALL  
TO DEEPER INTIMACY WITH GOD

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD



# By Way of the Red Sea

*The Work of God in the Wilderness of Life*



F. Wayne MacLeod

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## **By Way of the Red Sea**

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# Preface

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Exodus 13:17-18 contains some important details about the work of God in the lives of His people. In these two verses we see how God not only delivers His people from bondage, but also how, understanding their weaknesses and temptations, He leads, refines, equips, and matures them to become all He intended them to be.

What we see in these two verses teach us much about the commitment of God to this process of maturing those He delivers from bondage. They also reveal the different ways in which God works in our lives to bring about this maturity. Exodus 13:17-18 show us that our deliverance and salvation from the bondage of sin is only the beginning of what God intends to accomplish in our lives.

I trust that these two simple verses of Scripture will be an encouragement and challenge to all who take the time to study and meditate on them. May they give us a deeper appreciation of God heart for our spiritual growth and intimacy with Him.

God bless,

F. Wayne Mac Leod



# Chapter 1 - Delivered by God

---

17 When Pharaoh let the people go... (Exodus 13)

Exodus 13:17 begins with a statement of deliverance. To understand this, we need to set the scene and examine the context. The people of Israel were living in Egypt. They had settled there in the days of Joseph to escape a seven year famine that was ravaging their region.

Initially, the people of God experienced great blessing under the capable leadership of Joseph. They were settled in the region of Goshen, the richest pasture land in the region. Because Joseph was second in command and enjoyed the favour of Pharaoh, the Israelites experienced prosperity and peace in Egypt.

After the death of Pharaoh, however, things changed. The new king, seeing the prosperity and blessing of God on the Israelites, began to feel threatened. Exodus 1:8-11 describes his attitude toward God's people:

(8) Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph. (9) And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. (10) Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape



from the land." (11) Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. (Exodus 1)

During the reign of this new king, the children of Israel were reduced to slavery. Task masters were assigned to them and they were forced to work for Pharaoh in the construction of cities to store his wealth.

However, the blessing of God did not stop. Exodus 1:12 tells us that the more the people of God were oppressed the more they multiplied. This seemed only to intensify the fear that one day these Israelites would revolt. To deal with this perceived threat, the Egyptians increased the burden on God's people:

(13) So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves (14) and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. (Exodus 1)

To add to this hardship, Pharaoh commanded the Egyptian midwives to kill every Israelite male child they delivered. When the midwives refused to do this, Pharaoh broadened his command, ordering that every male child born to an Israelite family be thrown in the Nile River and drowned (Exodus 1:22).

We can only imagine the difficulties God's people faced in those days under this cruel oppression. They were forced to work for Pharaoh. Their male infants were being taken from them and killed. We have a record in Exodus 2:11 of an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave. Obviously, this was a common practice in the day. Exodus 2:23 tells us that

the people of Israel groaned under this heavy and oppressive burden and cried out to God for deliverance:

23 During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. (Exodus 2)

God raised up a man by the name of Moses to deliver His people from this terrible bondage. When Moses approached Pharaoh to ask him to release God's people, Pharaoh resisted. His heart was hardened toward Moses. Over the course of the days and weeks that followed, Moses would confront Pharaoh repeatedly. God empowered Moses in those days to perform many incredible signs and wonders before Pharaoh.

A series of plagues would strike the land of Egypt. Exodus 7-12 tells us that, through Moses, God turned the water of the Nile to blood (Exodus 7:14-15), brought a plague of frogs on the land (Exodus 8:1-15) and afflicted the people with gnats (Exodus 8:16-19), and flies (Exodus 8:20-32). In Exodus 9:1-7, God struck their livestock. He tormented the Egyptians with painful boils (Exodus 9:8-12), destroyed their crops with hail (Exodus 9:13-35) and locusts (Exodus 10:1-20). When these things would not soften the heart of Pharaoh, God plunged the nation into darkness (Exodus 10:21-29) and killed the first born male of every Egyptian home (Exodus 12:29-32). Egypt was devastated by the hand of God and Pharaoh was forced to let the people of Israel go.

After the people of Israel left Egypt, however, Pharaoh pursued them into the wilderness to bring them back. There by the Red Sea, Pharaoh and his army would be drowned

by God as a final act of judgement against them for their defiance (see Exodus 14).

We need to see Exodus 13:17 in this context. The verse begins with the phrase: "When Pharaoh let the people go." While Pharaoh did let the people of Israel go, it was not an act of goodwill and generosity on his part. Pharaoh is not the hero of the story—he is the villain. He is not the liberator of God's people, He is a defeated enemy. To the very end he fought to keep Israel under oppression. A more powerful hand than his was at work on behalf of God's people.

God used Moses to deliver the people but it is clear that the power for these great signs was not from Moses. Moses was only an instrument in the hands of the almighty God. As we begin this study of Exodus 13:17-18, we read a statement about the deliverance of God—"When Pharaoh let the people go." God's people were facing a struggle that was bigger than them. They were being oppressed, beaten and killed by a cruel hand. The power of the nation of Egypt was against them. They could do nothing about it. Pharaoh's strategy of oppression was working. It kept the Israelites discouraged and overwhelmed. In themselves, these disorganized and disheartened Israelite slaves were no match for the power of Egypt.

Even Moses understood the impossibility of the task (humanly speaking) to which God had called him. Who was Moses that he could deliver a whole nation from the bondage of slavery? The Israelites had been in Egypt for over four hundred years. They knew nothing but life in Egypt. Even if he could stand up to the whole army of Egypt, how could Moses provide for a whole nation in the wilderness? Where would he find provisions for a journey to the land God had promised this people? Moses understood that the

land to which they were going was inhabited by other nations. How was he going to convince these nations to give their land to the people of God? The task was enormous. It was not a task that meek Moses felt he could handle. He argued with God about this calling on his life. It was far more than he could handle. Moses did not deliver the people from bondage. He was simply an instrument in the hands of God. All glory for this deliverance belonged to the Lord God. He overcame the power of Egypt. God empowered His servant Moses. God crushed the enemy so that "Pharaoh let the people go."

What does the phrase "when Pharaoh let the people go" teach us? What does it tell us about the relationship God had with His people?

This phrase teaches us that God alone was Israel's deliverer. When they were enslaved by a power that was greater than them, the Lord God broke through to rescue them. Throughout the history of Israel, this rescue from Egypt would be remembered. Every year the people of God would celebrate the Passover, which commemorated the wonderful deliverance of God. They would look back to this time and be reminded of the God who set them free from the bondage of Egypt.

Israel's time in Egypt was very difficult. Never had things been so bad. Never had they been so helpless and hopeless. Sometimes God allows us to face these dark times to show us the reality of who He is. When everything was hopeless, God broke through. As we look at the story of Israel in the land of Egypt, we are reminded that no matter how hopeless we feel God is able to deliver. No matter how big the enemy is, we can take confidence in the Lord our God.

The story of Israel's bondage is an illustration of our own personal bondage in sin. The deliverance of God pictured in Exodus 13:17 illustrates what the Lord Jesus has done for us as believers today. We, too, found ourselves under a cruel taskmaster. Sin had enslaved us and we were destined for an eternity under the judgement of God. There was nothing we could do about this. We could not get rid of the burden of sin. Its stain left its mark on our lives. It was when we were in this helpless condition that the Lord Jesus reached out to deliver us. He set us free by the power of the cross from the grip of sin and Satan. We were forgiven and released from the wrath of God.

There may have been many people involved in this rescue. Maybe it was through the preaching of a pastor or the word of a faithful friend. Maybe it was through the example of a neighbour or a total stranger who ministered to you in a time of need. God uses many people to rescue His children from the grip of sin. Make no mistake, however, these individuals are mere instruments in the hands of God. God alone is our Deliverer.

Israel was indebted to God for this incredible deliverance. Had God not come to their rescue, they would have remained under the burden of slavery and been reduced to nothing. The whole course of Israel's history changed the day that God set them free. They would become a great nation under God. Through them a great Saviour would come to set us free.

We dare not take the deliverance of God for granted. As it was for Israel, the day God delivered us from sin was a life-changing day. It changed the whole course of our personal history. We would never be the same after that deliverance. This work of deliverance sets us on a completely

new path. It is the beginning of a wonderful relationship with God.

The deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt was not the end of the story. It was just the beginning. It was the starting point of a whole new life. What mother would think that delivering a baby meant the end of her work as a mother? Now that this baby has been born, the work of raising and nurturing this child has only begun. Have you experienced this wonderful deliverance of God today? If so, recognize that it is the doorway into a lifelong relationship with God and the beginning of a whole new work of God in maturing you in your walk with Him.

The work of God in Exodus 13:17-18 began with the deliverance of His people from the oppression and bondage of Egypt. God was interested in far more than delivering Israel. He had much more to do in them if they were to become all that He wanted them to be. In the remainder of this study we will examine this work of God.

For Consideration:

- What was Israel's situation in Exodus 13:17-18? How does her bondage illustrate our own bondage in sin?
- Why did Israel need a deliverer? Why do we need a deliverer?
- Why does God sometimes need to allow us to hit rock bottom before delivering us? How easy is it to see our own need? What blinds us to our need?

- Under what conditions did Pharaoh let the people of God go? What does this teach us about who the real deliverer was?
- How did life in Israel change when they were delivered from the bondage of Egypt? How did your life change when you were forgiven and delivered from the judgement of sin?
- How is deliverance from bondage only a beginning? What other work does God need to do if we are to become all He intends us to become?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the way He has delivered you from sin? If you have never asked for His forgiveness and deliverance take a moment now to do so.
- Ask God to continue the work He has begun in your life. Ask Him to mature you into the man or woman He intends for you to become.
- Ask God to give you grace to surrender more fully to His work of deliverance in your life. Are there still areas where you are being held in bondage to sin? Ask Him to give you victory in those areas of your life.

## Chapter 2 - Led by God

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17 ... God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near... (Exodus 13:17)

In the previous chapter, we saw the work of God in delivering His people from the bondage of Egypt. As we continue to examine Exodus 13:17, we see yet another important work of God—He also leads His people.

What would it have been like for the people of God to be left on their own after being delivered from the bondage of Egypt? They had been slaves all their lives. They knew nothing about warfare or wilderness survival techniques. The Lord delivered them into the desert. Where would they find food and provisions for their journey? What were the obstacles before them? How could this group of disorganized and abused slaves survive without the leading and provision of the Lord God?

Imagine a mother delivering a child and leaving it to fend for itself. Would we not question the love and devotion of such a mother? The Lord who delivers His children will not abandon them. He will lead them step by step into the purpose He has for their lives.

As the Israelites traveled through the wilderness toward the Promised Land, the leading of the Lord God was very



evident. Reflecting on this many years later, the Psalmist wrote:

14 In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a fiery light. (Psalm 78:14)

Guided by means of that cloud by day and a fiery pillar by night, God's people traveled safely toward the land He had promised them. As they navigated the obstacles before them, what a comfort it was to know that the God who delivered them also led them every step of the way.

Reflecting on this wonderful leading of the Lord, the Psalmist cried out:

16 To him who led his people through the wilderness, for his steadfast love endures forever (Psalm 136:16)

The writer of the book of Exodus expressed a similar sentiment when he said:

13 You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode. (Exodus 15:13)

Both authors attribute God's desire to lead His people to His tender affection and love. Like a mother providing for her newborn baby, God watches over those He delivers. In love He directs their steps. He protects them from harm and leads them in what is right for them.

This same leading is the privilege of every believer. In Psalm 23:3 King David said:

3 He restores my soul. He leads me in path of righteousness for his name's sake.

Later in Psalm 25:9 the psalmist would say:

9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

Expressing his worship to the Lord God in 2 Corinthians 2:14; the apostle Paul wrote:

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

In Romans 8:14 the apostle Paul would say:

14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Even the Lord Jesus depended on and sought the leading of the Spirit in His ministry on earth.

1 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness... (Luke 4:1)

Listen to what Jesus told his accusers in John 5:30:

30 I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me (John 5)

The Lord Jesus chose to walk in the leading of the Father and the Spirit. He did nothing on His own accord but was always in harmony with the purpose of the Father.

This leading of God is something we often take for granted in our day. We can see how this group of Israelite slaves would need the Lord to lead them through the desert, but we do not always see our own need of this same leading. We feel that our education and experience is sufficient. Could it be that the reason for our weakness and powerlessness as a church today is because we have failed to understand not only the privilege of God's leading but also the necessity of it.

We can build large ministries with human ideas and programs. We can navigate our way through life in worldly wisdom. Unbelievers can successfully administer profitable businesses and live rich and prosperous lives. This has led us to believe that our human wisdom and strength is sufficient.

Human wisdom and experience may be sufficient to get you through life. You may even build a large ministry by human wisdom and worldly techniques, but it takes the leading of God's Spirit to build His kingdom. God's ways are not our ways. Consider the ministry of the Lord Jesus from a human perspective. He lived a short life. He ministered sacrificially. He had no home or possessions to call His own. He had large followings, but people were more interested in taking advantage of Him than following what He said. When He was handed over to be crucified, the people who followed Him cried out for His death. When He died only a handful of believers remained faithful to Him and His teaching. Here was a man, however, who did nothing without seeking the leading of the Father. While from a human perspective He had failed, from the kingdom of

God's perspective there was no greater ministry. What He accomplished brought the Kingdom of God to earth and it has been growing every day since His death and resurrection.

Only when we walk in the leading and empowerment of the Spirit of God, will we impact this world as God intends. We need this leading of God if we are to become all He intends us to be. We must trust Him more than our own wisdom and experience. The God who delivered Israel also leads His children.

From Exodus 13:17 we discover that God chose not to lead Israel "by way of the Philistines." This would have been the shortest route for the children of Israel to take on the way to the Promised Land. It would also have been the logical route if one was looking at things from a human perspective. This was not God's way, however. God did not take His children the shortest way. He knew what was best for them. This long way would lead the people of Israel through the desert for forty years. In those forty years, not one person who left Egypt over the age of twenty years, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, remained alive—they all perished in the wilderness (see Numbers 14:28-30). Was this a success journey from a human perspective? God's ways are different from our ways.

With all our human wisdom, who would have thought to deliver Jonah by means of a great fish (Jonah 1:17)? Who would have chosen to deliver Israel from the Egyptians by parting the waters of the sea (Exodus 14:21-29)? Who would have spoken to Balaam by means of a donkey (Numbers 22:28)? When Naaman was told to wash seven times in the Jordan River to be healed of his leprosy, he became angry and initially refused to do so. Only when convinced by his servant did he relent and was healed. He

refused because his human wisdom did not accept the leading of the Lord (see 2 Kings 5). Time after time in Scripture we see how the Lord led His people by strange means to accomplish His purpose.

Like the bewildered Israelite slaves on the border of the great wilderness, we too, need to know this leading of God. Many of us have become content to make this journey on our own –doing the best we can. What blessings and fruit we miss, however. How exciting it is to know and walk in the leading of the Lord. His ways do not always make sense. He sometimes takes us the long way to the Promised Land but we can be assured that His ways are perfect.

Will you trust the leading of your Deliverer? He, who delivered you from the bondage of Egypt and sin, will also lead you in the way that is best for you. He may take you through the wilderness in paths you may not understand but be assured that it is because He loves you that He has chosen this path for you. He who delivered you has your best interest at heart.

Let me conclude with the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 37:

5 Commit your way to the Lord;  
trust in him, and he will act.  
6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the  
light,  
and your justice as the noonday.  
7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for  
him;  
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his  
way,  
over the man who carries out evil devices!  
8 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!

Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil  
9 For the evildoers shall be cut off,  
but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the  
land.

Commit your way to the Lord today. Trust in His leading. Wait for Him. He who delivered you will not abandon you. He will lead you into the path of righteousness. You will inherit what He has promised as you wait on Him. Don't worry about those who seem to prosper in their own plans. The day is coming when God will deal with them. It is for you to trust God and His leading.

For Consideration:

- Why did Israel need God's leading as they stood on the border of the wilderness?
- Why do you need God's wisdom today?
- What motivates God to lead us as His children?
- Why are we tempted to depend on our human education, experience and wisdom more than the leading of God?
- Can we build large ministries in human wisdom? Is a worldly successful ministry always from God?
- Is God's leading always easy? Does His leading always make sense?
- Have you been serving the Lord in human wisdom or according to His leading?

## For Prayer:

- Take a moment to confess your need of the Lord's leading in your life and ministry. Ask God to give you grace to seek Him and His purpose more.
- Thank the Lord for the fact that He does not deliver us and leave us to fend for ourselves. Thank Him that He desires to lead us step by step.
- Ask the Lord to teach you to submit to His leading in your life. Ask Him to help you to see how much you need His leading if you are to become all He would have you to be.
- Have you been struggling with the leading of the Lord in your life? Ask God to make you more willing to accept His purpose. Commit yourself to Him afresh.

## Chapter 3 - Understood and Protected by God

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For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt. (Exodus 13:17)

We saw in the previous chapter that the Lord led His people. There are different kinds of leaders. Consider, for example, an uncaring military commander leading his soldiers to their certain death. His goal is to capture the enemy stronghold. He is willing to sacrifice those under his command to do this. For this particular commander these soldiers are merely tools to accomplish this objective.

How does the Lord God lead His people? In Exodus 13:17 we see that He did not lead them by way of the Philistines even though that was nearer. Instead, He took them the long way. The reason for this is clearly stated in verse 17:

"For God said: "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt."

What does this phrase tell us about God and the way He led His children out of Egypt? Let's consider several details here.



*God Understands our Weaknesses*

The first point I want to make is that God leads us with a full understanding of our weaknesses. Living in this world is not easy. Sin and evil are ravaging our land and our bodies. Satan and his temptations are all around us. While the strength of the Lord is always available to us, we all have our weaknesses and struggles. King Solomon, for example, had 700 wives and 300 concubines. 1 Kings 11:3 tells us that these wives turned his heart away from God. This was an area of weakness for Solomon and it would eventually lead to his spiritual decline.

Sometimes these weaknesses are the result of immaturity. A new Christian, for example, may not have matured enough in the Lord to understand God's requirements. Paul speaks about this in 1 Corinthians 8 when he encourages the stronger brother not to eat anything that would cause a weaker brother to stumble.

God understands where we are in our spiritual walk. He knows our weaknesses and strengths. As He looked at the children He had delivered from Egypt, He saw their abilities and weaknesses. He knew what they could handle and what would be too much for them to bear. He knew them better than they knew themselves. Matthew 10:30 tells us that the Lord God knows the number of hairs on our heads. From Psalm 94:11 we learn that the Lord knows "the thoughts of man." The God who created us from dust knows our frailties and responds to this in loving compassion:

13 As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear  
him.

14 For he knows our frame;

he remembers that we are but dust.  
15 As for man, his days are like grass;  
he flourishes like a flower of the field;  
16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
and its place knows it no more.

The children of Israel, fleeing from Egypt, were weak and disorganized. Knowing their weakness, the Lord God made a decision. He chose not to lead them by way of the Philistines who would defend their territory by force against the Israelites. God knew that His people were not ready physically, emotionally or spiritually to face the Philistines, and so, in consideration of their weakness, He chose to lead them by means of another route. God's decision was based on a thorough knowledge of His people's weaknesses and abilities.

The Lord fully understood the people He was leading. He chose the path that was right for them. This is not to say that the path would be easy. There would be many difficulties on the way to the Promised Land, but all those obstacles were carefully measured by God, who knew what His children could handle. Listen to what the apostle Paul told the Corinthians:

13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

God would not let Israel be tempted beyond her ability. He led Israel away from the Philistines, knowing that this route would be too much for His children to bear. It is wonderful to know that the God who leads us will only lead us into

what He knows we can handle in His strength. This gives us great confidence as we follow His leading.

### *God Understands our Temptations*

Very closely related to this truth of God understanding our weakness is the idea that God also understands our temptations. Our weakness has to do with our inability to accomplish what God wants us to accomplish. Our temptations, on the other hand, speak to the matter of our heart and our desires. Notice what Exodus 13:17 tells us.

"For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt."

God understood that His people would be tempted to return to Egypt. Egypt was still in their blood. Its ways were still their ways. As oppressive as Egypt was, God knew that part of them longed to return to the land of their bondage.

Consider this for a moment. God was leading a people who would, with the slightest hint of difficulty, turn their back on Him. The history of God's people in the wilderness shows us how they grumbled against Moses and against God. Consider what happened in the region of Taberah, as the people complained "in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes" (Numbers 11:1):

4 Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh that we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic. 6 But now our strength is dried

up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at." (Numbers 11:4-6)

In the wilderness Israel looked with longing eyes at Egypt and the food they enjoyed in the land of their oppression.

This was not the only time we see Israel being tempted by their memories of Egypt. In Exodus 17, we read of a time in the wilderness where they had no water to drink:

1 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. 2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

Are we any different today? Who among us does not have to battle the temptations of the flesh and the sin from which we have been delivered? If we are honest with ourselves, there is not one of us who does not feel, in our flesh, the longing for sin and its ways. Until the flesh is completely crucified in us, we too will have to deal with its lusts and temptations.

Exodus 13:17 speaks of a God who knew that the people He was leading were tempted to wander from Him and His ways. He knew their hearts and how there was still a longing for Egypt in them. Israel's heart was a wandering heart. God often compared her to an unfaithful wife. Her lust for sin was not hidden from God. He knew her thoughts and

her sinful desires. He knew her appetite for Egypt. He heard her complaining and grumbling. Despite this, God still chose to lead her. In fact, if He had not led her, she would likely have returned to Egypt. The leading of God in the life of Israel protected her from her temptations. Sometimes it seemed that God was harsh but this was necessary to keep her on the right path. How wonderful it is to know that God did not give up on His people. Their heart was not fully devoted to Him, but He was certainly devoted to keeping and protecting them.

God led His people with a thorough understanding of the condition of their heart. He knew the lusts of her heart. I am so thankful that God does not give up on me. He continues to lead me even though He sees my heart. He patiently bears with me as I wrestle with those temptations and leads me in the way that will keep me safe from their harmful effects.

### *God Understands Our Need*

There is one final word I want to say about this portion of Exodus 13:17. God understands not only our weaknesses and temptations but He also understands what we need in order to overcome those weaknesses and temptations.

Deliverance from the bondage of Egypt was only the beginning for Israel. They now needed to be organized as a nation and come to understand the requirements of the Lord their God. They needed to learn to walk in His ways and to love Him wholeheartedly. This was going to be a long process. God took Israel the long way through the desert for a reason. They needed time to mature in their faith and understanding of their Deliverer. Over the course of the next few months and years, Israel would see the leading and provision of God. He would guide them step by

step by means of a cloud and pillar of fire. They would experience the power of His hand as He delivered them from the army of Egypt at the Red Sea. They would watch God provide food from heaven in the form of manna to sustain them day after day. They would see Him bring water from a rock to quench their thirst. What Bible school or Seminary could have given them such an education! Through all these experiences God was shaping their minds and revealing Himself to Israel.

The lessons God was teaching Israel in those days were often difficult. At times God's people were brought to the end of themselves. They faced the enemy head on. They felt fear as they watched the chariots of Egypt approach them by the Red Sea. They worried as they wondered where their next meal was going to come from or where they would find enough to drink in the desert. Over and over again, God proved Himself to them.

God led His people, knowing what they needed. He knew how to teach them the lessons they needed to learn. He had a purpose in all He did in those days. When God chose not to lead Israel by way of the Philistines, He chose to lead them in a way that would instruct and teach them all they needed to know to become the people He wanted them to be.

When God led the great fish to swallow Jonah, He knew exactly what He was doing and how to reach the heart of Jonah. In the belly of the great fish, the prophet repented of his sin and committed himself to walking in a deeper commitment to His God. When God allowed Joseph to be sold into slavery in Egypt, He knew that the day was coming when his presence in Egypt would be needed to save His people from a great famine that would ravage their land.

God doesn't just lead us. He uses everything we face to teach us and shape us into the people we need to be. God understands our weaknesses and our temptations and He knows how to lead us so that we can learn to overcome. He leads us into situations to teach and strengthen us. His interest is in our spiritual well-being and growth. As God turned His people from the route of the Philistines to the heart of the wilderness, there was purpose in what He was doing. Each step of the way, they would understand more about their God and His purpose for their life.

What He did for Israel, God does for us as well. He leads us with a full understanding of who we are, our weaknesses and temptations. He leads us personally knowing what we need in order to mature in Him and become fruitful for the sake of His kingdom. The question we need to ask ourselves here is this: "Will we trust what God is doing? Will we accept the detours He puts on our path? Will we walk in obedience to Him in order that we might become the sons and daughters He intends us to be? He, who knows us fully, will lead us in the path that is best for us.

#### For Consideration:

- What are your weaknesses? Have you been allowing God to lead you through those weaknesses to victory?
- Have you committed your weaknesses to the Lord and sought His leading in them? How has the Lord been giving you victory?
- How did the Lord respond in Exodus 13:17 to the weaknesses of Israel?

- God understands our temptations. He also does not give up on us. What does this teach us about the love and compassion of God?
- How has God been leading you? What lessons has He been teaching you through this leading?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He understands your weakness and will lead you knowing what you can handle.
- Thank the Lord that He does not leave us defeated by our weaknesses and temptations but leads us in paths that will teach us to overcome.
- Commit your weaknesses and temptations to the Lord today. Ask Him to lead you into victory. Ask Him to teach you how to be an overcomer. Ask Him to give you grace to follow His leading and to learn what He has for you to learn.





## Chapter 4 - Tested and Refined by God

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18 But God led the people around by way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea..." (Exodus 13)

In Exodus 13:17 we saw that God led Israel with a thorough understanding of her weaknesses, temptations and needs. Now in Exodus 13:18 He "led the people around by way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea."

The statement, "God led the people around by way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea," is significant. God had a particular reason for leading His people in this way. Let's consider this for a moment.

### *The Nature of the Wilderness*

Notice that verse 18 tells us that you God led the people by way of the wilderness – a barren place where nothing grew and there was no water. As they travelled through the wilderness, the people of God could not live off the land, for the land had nothing to offer them. They could not beg from the inhabitants of the land, for few people lived in this wilderness and those they met were often hostile toward them. As they ventured into this barren wasteland, the only one they could trust was God. This is exactly what the Lord intended. If the people of God were to become all

He intended them to be, the first thing they needed to learn was how to trust Him for the very basic things of life.

It is one thing to preach theology and Biblical truth and quite another to live it out in real life. There are many Christians today who know the truth about God but have never truly learned to trust Him and His leading in everyday matters. The people of Israel had heard stories of the great things God had done for their ancestors, but they needed to know this reality in their own lives. God took them into the wilderness to teach them to depend on Him and His leading.

The desert is not only a place devoid of the necessities of life but it is also a place without distractions. One of the greatest obstacles to spiritual growth is the distraction of this world. We just don't seem to have time for the Lord. When we do have time, our minds are cluttered with other things so that we cannot give Him the attention He deserves. How can we expect to grow in our walk with the Lord when we are so distracted? God led Israel into the wilderness. There in the wilderness, God's people were alone with their Deliverer. God had their attention. If they were going to survive they needed to look to Him for provision. If they were going to get through the desert, they needed His guidance. If they were going to overcome their enemies, they needed to trust Him for victory and strength.

The wilderness is not an easy place to be. It is a place where God strips us of our ability to trust in our own wisdom and strength. We have only one place to go—to Him. While the wilderness is not a pleasant place to be, it is where the Lord led Israel. He did so because He wanted to teach them and refine them. Admittedly, Israel was not

always willing to hear what God was saying. They grumbled and complained and refused to learn the lessons God wanted to teach.

A number of years ago now, I was in a car accident. I do not recall what happened. All I know is that I was driving my car to meet my wife for coffee at a local coffee shop when I passed out, flipped my car onto its roof and ended up a few feet away from a pond. Doctors could never figure out what happened that day. The result, however, was that the doctor took my driver's license away until they could figure out what happened.

The result of this accident was that I was no longer able to get to Bible studies and church events where I had been ministering. I lost about 75% of my ministry. This was a difficult time for me personally. It was a wilderness experience. I remember praying during that time, "Lord, I am willing to go through this, but don't let me come out the other end the same. Help me to learn the lessons you want me to learn." I believe there is one thing worse than having to go through the wilderness as a believer, that is, to go through the wilderness and not be changed by it for good. God led Israel by way of the wilderness because it was in that wilderness that He would best be able to reveal Himself and His purpose to them.

By leading Israel into the wilderness, God was making a commitment to them. He was committing Himself to provide for their every need, to guide them, to give them victory over every enemy they encountered along the way, to teach them and reveal Himself to them. This would be a forty year commitment! He who led them into the wilderness would go with them through that wilderness.

*The Reality of the Red Sea*

Notice also from Exodus 13:18 that the Lord God also led His people "toward the Red Sea." Why did God lead them toward the Red Sea? Again, God had a reason for what He did. Let's consider what took place at the Red Sea.

God led Israel through the wilderness to the shore of the Red Sea. Here at the Red Sea God's people faced a new challenge—they could go no further. The great sea before them blocked their path. Mountains surrounded them on either side. The only way out, from a human perspective, was to return by the way they had come. That path, however, was blocked by the approaching army of Pharaoh, who was quite confident they were trapped (see Exodus 14:3). It seemed that Israel had run out of options. She had nowhere to go. There was nothing she could do to escape certain defeat at the hands of the enemy.

The Red Sea was not only the place where Israel came to the end of herself; it was also the place where God demonstrated that the end of human strength is only the beginning of His. As the humbled nation stood helpless at the shores of the Red Sea, God moved in a powerful way to defend and guide them. The angel of the Lord stood between the approaching army of Pharaoh and the people of God. The pillar of cloud that had led God's people now separated them from the enemy, blocking Egypt's way. God then told Moses to stretch out his rod over the sea, and when he did, the waters parted so that the people of God crossed over to the other side. Only when they were safely on the other side, did the cloud move, allowing the Egyptians also to enter the sea in pursuit of Israel. When the Egyptian chariots entered the sea, however, the Lord caused the great walls of water to fall on top of them so that they drowned. The enemy was completely defeated.

There on the other side of the sea, God's people would no longer have to worry about the threat of Egypt. In fact, at this point, even if they wanted to return to Egypt, they would not likely have been welcomed. God closed the door to Egypt to them.

The Red Sea was where God humbled Israel and brought her to the end of her own resources. It was also the place where He showed her the power of His hand to overcome her greatest foe. All too often we do not rely on the Lord until we have come to the end of our human resources. We do all we can in human wisdom and experience and only when that is insufficient do we come to God for help. Could this be the reason for our weakness as the body of Christ today? The work of the Kingdom of God is not accomplished by human wisdom. In fact, the ways of God often defy human wisdom and ability. If the work of the Kingdom could be done in human strength we would not need the Spirit of God. God wanted to teach Israel a great lesson on the shores of the Red Sea. He wanted to teach them the truth of Zechariah 4:6:

"...not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts"

Until Israel came to the end of herself and was convinced that she needed the Lord and His wisdom, she could never become all God intended. We too must come to this point in our lives.

Some time ago I was speaking at a conference in the Philippines. After speaking in one of the sessions, I remember going back to my room and crying out, "Lord, I have nothing more to give." As I cried out in anguish to the Lord I felt Him speak to my heart. "Good, now maybe you will trust in

Me." I felt rebuked. I realized that I had been trusting in myself and not in the Lord.

God calls us to the Red Sea and places before us an impossible task. He does so to show us the futility of human wisdom and strength. As I look at the ministry the Lord has given me in writing and distributing books to believers around the world, I find myself standing before the Red Sea. I do not have the resources to supply these books free of charge to thousands of believers. I look at the sea before me and feel overwhelmed and powerless. I have also seen the Lord part that sea and provide a way. This is the wonderful thing about the Lord. He is able to do what we cannot do. He will do the impossible through you and me. His ways are beyond our ability to understand. As Israel stood on the other side of the Red Sea with the enemy conquered, they must have looked over that sea and wondered what had just happened. I have found this in my ministry. As I look back over the years, I have often wondered at the provision and blessing of the Lord. The task was beyond me and my ability but God did what I could not imagine and I stand like the people of God on the opposite shore amazed at His provision and guidance.

Not only did the Red Sea bring God's people to the end of themselves, it also showed them the importance of faith in God. There would be many such obstacles before them on the road that lay ahead. The land before them was hostile and desolate. What would they do when they faced these obstacles? The lesson at the Red Sea would be a reminder to them. The God who parted the Red Sea and gave them victory over Egypt would direct and lead them into victory in whatever circumstance they faced. They simply needed to trust in Him and have faith in His leading and empowerment.

What will we do when we come up against a Red Sea in our lives? What will we do when our human wisdom and strength is insufficient? Will we give up or will we trust in the God of the impossible? God showed His people what He could do that day at the Red Sea. This would be a lesson that Israel would need to learn over and over again as they travelled through the wilderness. I suspect that this lesson of faith in God is a lesson we too will need to learn in our walk as well. The obstacle before us must be overcome by faith in God's ability and leading.

Finally, the Red sea was a place of victory for Israel. As they wandered in the wilderness toward the Red Sea, Israel may have been looking over her shoulders for Egypt. Egypt was still in their blood and thoughts. If God's people were going to become all He intended them to become, they would need to experience victory over this enemy. They could not live with the enemy always on their back. There at the Red Sea the Lord did a wonderful thing. He completely destroyed the enemy of His people. He gave them complete victory over this threat.

From that moment on, Israel could move through the wilderness with no more fear of Egypt. This enemy was no more. That is not to say that Israel did not look back to their time in Egypt with lustful longing. They would be tempted, but the enemy had been defeated. It was now up to them to live in the victory the Lord had given.

There at the Red Sea, Israel had to face her enemy. The Lord God overcame the enemy when Israel could do nothing in their own strength. God wants to do the same for us. As He leads us into the wilderness, He wants to rid us of the obstacles that entangle us, keeping us from reaching our potential. To do this, God forces us to confront our enemy head on. Sometimes, our private sins become public.



Sometimes He brings us to a point where we are willing to recognize our sin. At other times, He will show us our inability to overcome without Him. We stand face to face with this impressive enemy with only God to call on for help and victory. God reaches out to us in these times and sets us free to face the sea before us and overcome.

What do we see in this section of Exodus 13:18? We see how God, knowing the weakness and temptations of His people, chose to take them through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. This was a conscious and purposeful decision on God's part. He did this to bring Israel to the end of herself. He did it to get her full attention and to give her victory over her enemies. God led them step by step, refining and testing them all the way. He committed Himself to them and their spiritual growth. He, who delivered them from Egypt, led them and refined them through the obstacles they faced in the wilderness.

The wilderness we experience today is a place where God can teach us about Himself and reveal His presence to us in a new way. The Red Sea is a place where, coming to the end of ourselves, we learn to trust in God who gives complete victory. Will we let Him lead us through the wilderness toward the Red Sea? Will we let Him bring us to the end of our resources so that in His strength and wisdom we can be truly overcomers?

## For Consideration:

- How was the wilderness an ideal place for God to teach His people about Himself and His purpose?
- What kind of distractions do we need to deal with in our day?
- Have you had to face a wilderness experience? What lessons did God teach you in that time?
- What did the Red Sea represent for the people of God?
- Why does God bring us to the end of our own resources?
- What entanglement or sins do you need to face today? Can you trust God for victory?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to refine us through the things we suffer in this life. Thank Him that He has committed Himself to helping us to reach our potential in Him.
- Ask the Lord to show you the distractions in your life that keep you from becoming all He wants you to be.
- Are there sins or hindrances in your life that keep you from becoming the Christian you should be? Thank the Lord for the victory He gave His people Israel over their enemy. Ask Him to give you a similar victory today.
- Ask the Lord to help you to walk in His strength and leading. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have trusted your own wisdom and strength rather than His. Ask Him to bring you to the end of yourself so that your confidence can be in Him and His strength.



## Chapter 5 - Matured by God

"And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle." (Exodus 13:18)

In this study, we have seen the commitment of God toward His people. We saw how He intentionally led His people through the wilderness toward the Red Sea in order to reveal Himself to them and refine them in their walk with Him. He understood their weaknesses and had great patience with them in their temptations.

Exodus 13:18 ends with an interesting statement:

"And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle."

Notice something interesting in this statement. The verse tells us that Israel was equipped for battle when she went out of Egypt. In other words, she was equipped with all she needed the moment she was delivered from her bondage. God did not send her into the battle without first giving her every tool she needed to overcome the enemy. When she left Egypt, she was already fully equipped for any battle she would have to face.

We can understand how important it would have been for the nation of Israel to be equipped for the battles she would face on her way to the Promised Land. This statement, however, seems out of place in the context of God's work

of leading and refining in the wilderness. If Israel already had the tools necessary for the battles when she left Egypt, why did God still have to lead and refine her?

To answer this question, we need to understand the difference between being equipped and being mature. A newborn baby is fully equipped to speak and communicate. All that is necessary is in place. It will take some time, however, for that newborn to begin speaking in full sentences. This young life needs to mature and learn how to use what God has given. This takes place as the child matures.

What is true for a young baby was also true for the people of Israel. When God delivered them out of Egypt, He provided them with all they needed to overcome the enemies they would face on the way to the Promised Land. The presence of God led them in the way they needed to go. The strength of the Lord overcame their enemies. The power of God pushed back the walls of the sea, provided for their hunger, and when they were thirsty brought water from a rock. They lacked nothing as they traveled through the wilderness.

While God's people lacked nothing, we still see them falling short of the purpose of God. They grumbled and complained. They fell into sin and lacked confidence in the Lord God who parted the sea. In fact, apart from Joshua and Caleb, not one of those who left Egypt over the age of twenty ever saw the Promised Land. They all perished in the desert. Though they were equipped for battle, it appears that many of them lost that battle.

This brings up the question: "If the people of Israel left Egypt equipped for battle, why were they defeated in the wilderness?" The problem lies not in the equipping but in learning to use what God had given.

When the Lord Jesus saved you from your sin and made you His child, He equipped you with all you needed to walk in victory. He placed His Holy Spirit in your life to lead and empower you. He gave you spiritual gifts to use for the sake of His kingdom. He called you to a particular task and promised to lead you each step of the way. He left you with His Word as a guide into His purpose for your life. You have all you need to overcome. He provides you with the tools necessary to walk in victory.

While God equips us fully, it is up to us to learn how to use what God has given. The great problem of our day is not that we are not equipped, but that we have never tapped into what God has given. This was the problem Israel faced in the desert. The presence of God led them by means of a cloud and fiery pillar but when they came to the Red Sea they could not believe that this same God was big enough to overcome the approaching Egyptian army. God parted the Red Sea for them but when they ran out of water on the other side, they complained bitterly and prepared to die. They were unable to trust God and the victory He had for them.

As God's people left Egypt, they were fully equipped with all they needed, but they did not know how to use what God had given. This is why God chose to lead them through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. As they took this route, God began the process of training them in how to use the resources He had made available to them. He showed them how to trust in His leading. He taught them that even when their human reason could find no escape, He was able to provide a solution. He showed them how He could give them victory over the most powerful army on the earth if they would trust in Him and His leading. These were incredible lessons to learn.

What we need to see from this is how equipping and maturing walk hand in hand. Some time ago I was speaking to a pastor in another country. He was a man who did not have much education. As we communicated, he told me that all he needed was the Holy Spirit to lead and empower Him. He wasn't particularly interested in being trained or learning from Christian books. As I reflected on this now, I see Israel wandering through the wilderness with the Spirit of God leading them step by step. I also see them falling in the wilderness because they did not understand God's ways and were being misled by their own reason.

Imagine giving a gun to a soldier but never training him or her to use it. Imagine giving your car keys to a young person but never giving them lessons in how to drive. God gives us spiritual gifts but this does not mean that we automatically know how to use those gifts. Learning to use the gifts God has given takes time and maturity. Our effectiveness in the use of God's gifts grows as we mature in our faith and understanding of God and His Word.

One of the things I have learned over the years is that God uses what we have learned and experienced in life. There have been many times that I have been studying a passage of Scripture and the Lord brought someone to my path that needed that very passage. I was able then to share the truths God was teaching me. I have also seen how God has enabled me to use the lessons learned from difficult times to encourage someone going through a similar situation. The gifts that God has equipped me with became more effective as I allow Him to reveal His Word and His character to me.

In Matthew 7:22-23 we read about a group of workers who served the Lord in what appears to be a wonderful way but their ministry was not approved by God.

22 On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and cast our demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?" 23 And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

These individuals prophesied, cast out demons and did miracles in the name of the Lord God. They likely attracted a large crowd of followers who believed in them and their work. Jesus, however, looked at them and said: "I don't know you or your ministry. You are workers of lawlessness." They ministered in Christ's name but they were not ministering as obedient and faithful servants. They were not serving according to His purpose and plan. They were "workers of lawlessness" doing as they pleased but not walking in obedience to God and His leading. There is a great warning for us in this—if we want to be effective in the Work of the Kingdom, it takes more than using our spiritual gifts—it also requires an understanding of God and His purpose. This comes only as we mature in our understanding of Him, His leading and His Word.

As we look at this final section of Exodus 13:17-18, we see how God provided Israel with all she needed the moment she left the land of Egypt. To be effective in the use of the tools God had given her, however, she needed to be matured in her understanding of God and His purposes. To mature them, God brought them through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. There on that journey, Israel would be taught about God and His character. She would learn about His care, provision and guidance. She would learn about His laws and requirements. As she matured and learned these lessons, she would become more and more effective in using the wonderful gifts and abilities the Lord had given her to use.



What is true for Israel is also true for us today. God has given us many wonderful gifts and abilities. He has equipped us for battle. In Him, we are fully able to overcome any enemy that comes our way. Having said this however, the Lord sometimes brings us through wilderness experiences in order to teach us more about Himself so that we can be effective in the use of these gifts and abilities. He has given us His Word to be a guide in how to use the resources He has placed at our disposal.

Listen to what Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Notice the connection between God giving His Word and us being equipped for every good work. Again we see the connection between maturing in our understanding of God and His Word and our being effective in the work of the kingdom.

The God who delivered Israel equipped her with every tool necessary to face the battle before her. He led His people every step of the way to the Promised Land. Understanding their weaknesses and temptations, He committed Himself to refine them through the things they faced in the wilderness and at the Red Sea. He taught them about Himself and His ways to mature her in her walk so that they could effectively handle the weapons He had placed at their disposal. If they failed to reach the Promised Land, it would not be because of a lack of provision and commitment on God's part. It would be because they refused to learn what God so patiently had been teaching.

How we need to open our eyes to this ongoing work of God in our lives. From these two verses of Scripture we see how much God cares for and invests in His people. He gives us all we need for the journey ahead. We lack nothing to live a victorious Christian life. What God did for Israel in those early days, He is doing in your life and mine today. He is still delivering, leading, refining and maturing. He is doing this so that we can be the overcomers He intends us to be. May He receive the glory due His name for the wonderful work in us. Praise be to the God who not only delivers but also trains and matures us to be powerful warriors for His glory.

#### For Consideration:

- How has God equipped you for life and ministry? What has He invested in you?
- What is the difference between being equipped and being mature?
- How important is it for us to be mature in our understanding of God and His ways if we are to be effective in ministry and service?
- How has God been maturing you in the past few years?
- What is the connection between the Word of God and our being effective in "good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17)?
- Is it possible to be busy in service for God and not be doing God's work as He requires because of a lack of understanding and maturity?

## For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the specific gifts and ministry he had given to you.
- Ask the Lord to give you more time with Him to be able to grow in your understanding of Him and His purposes. Ask Him to mature you in your walk with Him.
- Ask God to help you to understand how He would have you use the abilities and talents He has given you. Ask Him to open your eyes to the things He has been teaching you through the circumstances you face in life.
- Ask for forgiveness for the times you have failed to learn the lessons the Lord was teaching you. Thank the Lord for His patience with your weaknesses and temptations. Ask Him to help you to be a better student of his Word.

## Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date thousands of books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated a number of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

For more information about Light To My Path Book Distribution visit our website at <http://ltmp-homepage.blogspot.ca>