

Wilderness Wandering (Part 1)

A Foundation For Our Pilgrimage

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This sermon begins where we left off on the Holy Day, so I want to lead us along from that ending by reminding us of how deeply entrenched sin is within us. Jesus said that sin resides right in our heart, and at that point it is not actively doing something heard or seen externally, but it is still there. It is still sin.

Paul identified it as, "sin that dwells in me." Sin can clearly be likened to a disease and is, in that sense, the residue of Satan's spirit that infects us as a result of our contact with him, his fellow-demon spirits, and with this world in which we live, work, and play. That residue keeps generating sinful thoughts, words, and conduct after we are converted, and this brings it into direct conflict with *God's* spirit, and at the same time makes us feel so badly that we still sin so often.

Well, be comforted, at least to some degree. God knows this, and He has willed that this battle be fought, because it is part of our preparation for the Kingdom of God.

We are going to look briefly into a number of verses as we begin here in John 8, because these verses feed into our responsibilities as taught by these Days of Unleavened Bread. The Days of Unleavened Bread teach us our part in God's plan of salvation.

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.

Within the context of Jesus' instruction in this chapter, this is a remarkable all-encompassing statement. It includes us right within it to some degree. Regardless of race, ethnicity, political affiliation, academic standing, Pharisee or Sadducee, or economic status, all are slaves of sin. No one escapes this identification.

Biblically, slavery generally indicates powerlessness. It indicates one who has little independence of choice, rather *dependent* upon the virtual control of some thing or someone, indicating an owner. So you have an owner/slave relationship. In some contexts, this dependence can easily be classed as an addiction one is powerless before. In a sense then, the addiction actually *owns* the person and is driving his life in many circumstances.

Peter describes false ministers very well when he says in II Peter 2:19, "While they [the false ministers] promise them liberty, they [the false ministers] themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage." Now the corruption is their false teaching, which they in all probability are living by.

Within the context here in John 8, that person who brings one into bondage is primarily Satan. He is the prime example of one living according to the very teaching he is using to persuade others to live by.

John 8:36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

Through Jesus Christ, one's bondage to Satan is broken; however, the effect of that bondage remains by means of the residue of Satan's spirit, most noticeably in terms of engrained habits of thinking and conduct, and this must be overcome if we are ever to be like Jesus Christ. The bondage is broken, and we are enabled to continue on, but we are not completely free of it. That residue of his spirit is there.

John 8:31-32 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Though the absolute bondage to Satan is broken, the process of overcoming the residue of that spirit is not immediately accomplished. Notice what Jesus said here. It requires consistent abiding, continual spiritual contact with the Son, by faith, to work toward the completion of the project, and the completion of the project in this context is to be *completely* free of bondage to Satan.

In practical application this means by study, prayer, and faithful submission to God's word. What matters in this context that involves study, prayer, and faithful submission to God's word is the relationship with Jesus Christ. That is what matters here, because where is the strength to overcome, to resist the pulls of that bondage? It is going to come from Christ by means of His spirit within the relationship that we have with Him, and it is the making of practical use of the truth of God that breaks through the engrained habit of following Satanic lies within one's life.

John 8:43-44 Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. [This is an astounding statement.] You are of your

father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.

He is making a contrast between Satan and Himself and people's readiness to listen to His instruction, and He just said in verse 43 that the people to whom He was speaking "are not able" to listen.

John 8:44 He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

Some modern commentators translate that one phrase in verse 43, "Because you are not able to listen to My word," as, "You cannot *bear* to listen to My word." This is pretty rich and is much clearer. The reason they changed it to that is because those words, "You are not able to listen," have the sense of being unable to pick something up. They cannot bear to do it. It is either repulsive— whatever it is they are trying to pick up—or it just simply is too heavy. And so the people to whom He was speaking, He gives them a good reason as to why they were not listening, getting what He was saying, because they could not even *bear* to it. It was as though it was an automatic rejection of whatever came out of His mouth. To them He could not possibly be right, and so therefore their mind was already set against what He was saying.

What we have to understand is that because of our conversion, we have been enabled to bear to listen. That does not mean we always *want* to hear something Christ has to say. Maybe we do not want to hear it because it is correcting us, and so our defense goes up. But we still are enabled with the power to push that defense out of the way, and we are *willing* at least to listen. We can at least mark it down that this is something we are going to work on and we are going to overcome it. But that is only because we are receiving that bit of grace, that gift, from God's spirit that is in us.

In order to impress this on us to consider what God did with the people of Israel in Egypt, let us recall that Egypt was a type of Satan's world, and God shows this by this analogy what He literally did with Israel by getting them out and away from Egyptian contact altogether. In other words, He really took them out of the world, but as we are going to see, they took the world with them. They were unconverted, and they were not able to bear what they were being told by Moses and Aaron, so they kept rejecting it despite the fact that they were free from their bondage in Egypt.

From this analogy we can gain understanding as we perceive *our* life in Christ, and can

make practical applications to it at this present time rather than merely see it as Israel's historical record. This is without a doubt the most complete analogy in the entire Bible as to what we are to do with our life after being converted. I am talking about the wilderness journey.

There is a scene in the *Ten Commandments* movie in which Edward G. Robinson, playing Dathan, utters a question of supreme significance to us. In the movie, the scene was the morning after the Death Angel went through and passed by the Israelites, but the firstborn of Egypt were killed, and the Israelites were assembling to leave. The Israelites were in a joyous mood. The background music swelled into a vibrant march, and John Derek, playing Joshua, had come to Dathan's home to rescue his love, as played by Debra Paget. She was being held captive in Dathan's home. Well Joshua announced to Dathan that they were leaving their slavery in Egypt, and Dathan, in a rather cynical tone, a voice combined with a perplexed look on his face asked, "Where are we going?" Nobody answered him, and I guess it was assumed that everybody else knew.

In one sense this issue of where we are headed with our life is of greater individual importance to us than it was to the Israelites coming out of Egypt. The individual Israelite was pretty much going to go along with the crowd like Richard was talking about in his sermon, but *our* calling, brethren, is far more individualistic, and that puts pressure on us in a way that it did not on the Israelites.

Exodus 13:17-18 Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

In one sense, the Israelites knew where they were headed in some of the same manner that we know today where we are headed. It is doubtful that anyone of them had ever been to the Promised Land, even as none of us has even been to the Kingdom of God, but they knew the promise that was made to Abraham, because Hebrews 4 tells us clearly that the gospel was preached to them. Moses would have told them.

They knew the land's location, but it was nonetheless a vague generalized goal about which they had few particulars. They particularly did not know anything about the pilgrimage that lay ahead, and they were in store for a pretty great number of surprises.

They knew nothing of the length of that pilgrimage, or of the manna, or of water from the rock, or of huge flocks of quail, or kind of privation and scarcity.

The most direct route to Canaan was through the land Philistia, but the Philistines were a warlike people, and surely Israel would have resisted, and Israel was in no way prepared to overcome them. They did not know that, but God did.

Let us ask a little question here before we go on. Are you aware that God knows exactly where He is taking you, and that your life is in for quite a number of twists and turns and surprises? Are you still willing to follow Him even though there might be many, many periods of doubt that you had made the right choice?

Even two years later, on the borders of the Promised Land, they lost their faith and refused to confront the people of the land in war. God knew what He was doing. In a way, they were no more prepared for war two years later than they were when they went out, and so here, really, at the very beginning of their pilgrimage we might mark the first of many completely unexpected twists and turns that would occur before they ever got to Canaan. How many would survive? You already know that pretty much, but the loss was heavy, was it not?

These verses show the very clear pattern that God does not always lead one's life the way that seems on the surface to be best to us, and thus questions begin to surface. Would Israel continue to follow God through Moses? And even if they did, what kind of attitude would they be in *when* they were doing it?

Let us make a more direct connection to you and me. We are going to go to I John 3. We are going to make a connection from us to the Israelites.

I John 3:1-2 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; **and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be.**

Much of our future is hidden from us, I mean in terms of specifics. We know only generalities.

I John 3:2 And it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

But we will not *be* Him. We will be somewhere down the line as a part of His family, and there will be likenesses between us and Him, but our preparation is going to be made with what *He* has in mind for us. Here is even John, an apostle, saying we do not know what we are going to be. Some people are going to be doorkeepers. Others are going to do other jobs.

I John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Let us pause just a second to remember the Israelites did not purify themselves. This burden is put on you and me, and when we hear God's word, brethren, are we able to bear it? Yes we can, because God enables us not only to bear it, but also understand it, and even to desire it. That is important. That is a gift from Him.

We are commanded to live our life by faith, so we too, like the Israelites, must learn to trust His judgment. God says in Isaiah that He knows the end from the beginning, so we too may say that we know the end. For us, all we know though is that it is the Kingdom of God, but the reality is that we have never been there, and we do not know what we will be until the very end. And so as Paul said in I Corinthians 13:13, "We look through a glass darkly." We see things vaguely. That is a reality. I cannot change that. I can only hope to give *you* hope, that your hope will be in God, and that you will trust Him and His judgments He makes in regard to your life. I also know that there are times that it is going to be very difficult.

If you are following me in this analogy, we have not even left the Red Sea yet! But what I am getting at here, brethren, is we have to have the goal fixed in our mind even though we can only see it vaguely. There is enough trust in God that it is so awesome, it is so great, it is so meaningful, it is so wonderful, it is so good that it is going to be worth every bit of effort we have to make in order to make it there. We have to trust Him, that along the way He will *a/ways* give us what we need to meet the conditions He has set for us so we can go through life with the hope in God.

Let us go to Numbers 13. I am taking you back to that two-year mark again just to touch bases here.

Numbers 13:32-33 And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom

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we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

Numbers 14:1-2 So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!

Oh, what a lament! What a difference from right after they crossed the Red Sea where they sang God's praises of His greatness.

Numbers 14:3-4 Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."

So on this occasion, two years into their journey, they met a challenge of greater magnitude than they ever expected. In the wilderness of their pilgrimage, God did make Israel's way narrow and difficult, and now they were ready to give up.

Again, if we are following the analogy, we should understand that when God made that unexpected turn of a direction right at the beginning of their pilgrimage, it should signal us too that He has more in mind than merely taking us to the Kingdom of God, and it should signal us that there is far more preparation than we can begin to imagine in getting us ready for *living* in the Kingdom of God. For Israel, their life was just as stressful as ours, but in a different way and for a much different end than it had been in Egypt.

Using this analogy as a backdrop, there is a major question for us to consider in relation to our calling. Knowing that we are required to live by faith, how would a people who were slaves all their lives use the liberty given to them? This includes you and me, and this is why I started as I did. Jesus said that everybody who sins is a slave of sin, and so all of us in that regard are slaves, but not everybody to exactly the same degree, but we are enslaved to some degree to Satan's spirit.

So how would people who had been slaves all their life use the liberty given to them? The answer is, unless there is overall guidance from above, they would, with a few

minor adjustments, use it in the same way as they had been trained in their world in Egypt. Their experiences as slaves in Egypt were virtually all they had to go in terms of how to live, and this brings up another question.

How much experience had they had in governing themselves God's way? Again the answer: As slaves, it is entirely possible others had structured their entire existence, and that entire existence was structured under Satan's supervision. From the time they got up in the morning till lights out at night, somebody was telling them what to do, how to do it, and when to do what they did do. In Egypt, in their world, they were hardly ever confronted with making a meaningful moral choice.

Please brethren, feed that analogy into ourselves. There is an awful lot of preparation to be made before getting us into the Kingdom of God. We have a tendency to think it might be over quickly. We have a tendency to hope it is going to be easy, but we shall see, as we go along, God will make it proportionally difficult to what He is preparing us to be in His kingdom. Because our calling is individualistic, not everybody has exactly the same measure of difficulty.

A slave does not have many choices, and being free means the added responsibility of making choices relative to one's life within a way of life no one has ever lived before. When we become God's children we have lived portions of God's way. None of us is actually destitute completely in this regard, but until that time, we have never been required to do everything we possibly can. So what does that mean? We are inexperienced—all of us—in a way of life that is the best way of living, but it is one that requires a great deal of preparation.

Again, for the Israelites, it is always good to consider that in their background of spiritual, moral, and ethical instruction and decision-making, all that they did have was from an anti-God system. I am giving you reasons as to why they failed, so we should not look down on them. God was using them in a way He is not using us. They were the example that we are not necessarily to follow, but we are to learn from. We do not want to follow them in everything they did, because God is showing us, through them—"This is what happens when I give you freedom but I do not also give you My spirit that enables you to live My way of life." And so when we fit our failures, it is very likely that what we are doing is living like the Israelites did, or thinking like they did.

Let us go to Numbers 9 as we continue to add things here.

Numbers 9:15-23 Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until

morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire. So it was always: The cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents. At the command of the LORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped. Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not journey. So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: According to the command of the LORD they would remain encamped, and according to the command of the LORD they would journey. So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: When the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey. Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey. At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed; they kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

This inset of instruction is positioned on the first day of the first month as the second year of leaving Egypt began. The tabernacle—the central place of worship—had just been established, and in the analogy we are to understand that God occupies the same position in relation to us. "He is there!" That is the name Abraham gave to God. "He is there." Wherever His people are, He is there. It is His family that He is with, and His oversight of His family is to be understood by anybody who is trying to live by faith. **He is there!**

We cannot literally see the Cloud, but nonetheless, by faith we know that He is there, and one of the major elements in this section is establishing not only that God's presence is with them, but His sovereignty over them at all times. I read the whole thing so that you could see when God said, "Go," they went. When God said, "Stop," they stopped. If it was for one year, one day, or whatever, God was always in charge of His family and the progress they made toward the Promised Land. So in terms of their overall movement toward the Promised Land—the goal—He always triggered them.

If we are starting out on a journey we make all kinds of advanced preparation in the

hope that we can meet any eventuality that might arise. If it is the Feast of Tabernacles, we reserve motel space, clothing for every occasion, rain gear, sufficient money, credit cards, automobile in good repair, plot your route, and project ahead.

Now consider this contrast. God led Israel through the wilderness, and they apparently had no advance notice of when He was ready to move. Are we ready to move on God's notice?

"Wilderness" does not necessarily mean a barren desert, though that might apply in this situation. That is what you always see in the movies, but from what I have heard, it really was not much of a desert, but it was a wilderness. Using this term from the Hebrew, Antarctica, which has no trees at all, would be a wilderness, and so would an African tropical jungle, which might have billions of trees, but it is still a wilderness because the basic meaning of this word, "wilderness," is simply uncharted. It is an area in which there are no roads.

Are you thinking with me, brethren, about using this analogy? God, in a sense, is taking us to a place on our pilgrimage that is uncharted territory for us. It is not completely uncharted, because there are examples and so forth in God's word that we can look to, but He wants us to understand He wants us to follow Him. This is very important. We worship God. We do not worship a church. We do not worship a minister. We worship God. That is our focus, and we have to have our thinking focused on Him.

You might recall that Moses asked his father-in-law, Hobab, to be, "eyes to us." His father-in-law had several different names, but where Moses asked him this, his name was Hobab. Moses asked Hobab to be "eyes to us." In other words, to be a guide, because he was familiar with the area. It was almost like home to him. Remember that Moses spent forty years out in that same general area, but nobody knew that wilderness like Hobab did, and so Moses asked him to be eyes for them.

Now what does that make Hobab? In this position, Hobab became a type of God's Holy Spirit giving guidance, which is telling us in the analogy that God does not leave us alone. He says, "I will come unto you." Jesus said, "I will come unto you." By their spirit they come. He said, "We will take up our abode in you." And so even though we are out in this uncharted wilderness, there is a promise from Him that He will be with us by means of His spirit. So we are never really alone like we might think we are alone if we are walking by sight.

The Cloud and the Fire were symbols of God's presence, and that circumstance by itself is somewhat comforting, but it also added a fairly stressful situation into this mix

because they never knew when the Cloud or Fire would move, and God always set the timing. That is another point to remember. God runs things, and when we go off on our own, we are in trouble. We have to learn to be looking toward Him at all times. They had to be in a constant state of readiness, with one eye cocked on the Cloud. In that sense God is showing that they were literally living by sight. You see, He gives us something to let us understand that they are not quite the same as us. They were living by sight. We are not. So, once converted, do we see God in our lives, and then totally tied to when and where the invisible God is leading us?

We are going to go back to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 29, and we will touch on the Israelites once again, showing an advantage we have over them. Brethren, these are verses that should be colored in or underlined, or whatever, because it sets a clear difference between them and us.

Deuteronomy 29:2-4 Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the LOORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land—the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. Yet the LOORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.

Israel went on that journey as unconverted as a cat. In some cases, like I said, most of them had a pretty good attitude. But they still did not know what was going on, and so in almost every case they had a very powerful carnal tendency within them to follow the crowd. They should have followed Moses and Aaron, Caleb, Joshua, and Phinehas, and a few others who really were converted, but they did not because their carnal tendency pulled them in a wrong direction.

Let us go from here back to the book of Hebrews. As we go through here, I am trying to help you understand that we not only have a difficult pilgrimage to make, but God has not made it so difficult that it cannot be done. He is with us. He gives us help. He gives us guidance and so forth that we need to continue to go the way He wants us to go, but we have to, as it were, keep our spiritual eyes on Him like Israel had to keep their physical eyes on the Cloud.

This is a testimony of what happened to those people in the wilderness. Just tie this into what we just read, especially in Deuteronomy 29, verse 4.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let

us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

There was the problem. They did not have spiritual faith. They saw the miraculous things God did, and they were amazed and wondered by what they saw. They would cheer God and compose songs about Him, and did things like dancing and so forth, and then two weeks later it was gone from their minds. They learned no lesson because they were not given God's Holy Spirit, and they did not have the faith like Moses and Joshua and Caleb, and so forth.

God has given you and me a tremendous advantage by converting us and giving us His spirit. And so those people never grasped the significance of Moses, of Aaron, the giving of the law, their being accepted into the presence of God, the priesthood, the tabernacle, the rituals, the making of the covenant, the manna, the water from the rock, from the length of time they trudged through the wilderness. They never made the proper connection, because they allowed their present difficulties to overshadow their trust in God's promises. The result was that the wilderness became strewn with their bones from Sinai to Canaan, as they died in their misunderstanding.

You might compare this to modern America. Fox News took a poll in 2005, and claimed that 91% of Americans believe that God exists. That very same poll said 87% of the people believe there is a heaven, and that 76% in another poll said that they think they have an excellent chance of getting there. That is modern America. But the Bible—the truth of the Creator God—shows heaven is not the right goal, and besides that, people have formed all kinds of unrealistic conceptions about it, and this tends to show that uninformed people are leading lives that are motivated by wrong goals and perceptions about life and its purpose. This is exactly what happened to the Israelites because they did not believe Moses. I am sure they got excited from time to time, but they really did not have the faith to keep them going, and instead they kept allowing themselves to be directed by their Egyptian-born slave mentality.

You can probably recall reading maybe at one time in your life *Alice In Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. Maybe it drove you up the wall, so you did not read it very long. You could not stick with it. But it is an interesting book. Many people today seem to think it as a children's story about zany characters dwelling in a fantasyland that Alice fell into by accident. Well, its intent was far different from that. Mr. Carroll wrote it as a political satire, attempting to describe the madcap political scene in England at the time in his life.

At one point in her journey, attempting to return home, Alice had a conversation with the Cheshire cat. Listen to this dialogue:

"Cheshire cat," said Alice, "would you tell me, please, which way should I go from here?" "Well that depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat. Alice said, "I don't care much where." And then the cat said, "Well, it doesn't matter much which way you go." "So long as I get some place," Alice added as an expression. "Oh, you are sure to do that," said the cat, "if you only walk long enough."

Brethren, that is what the Israelites were doing. There was no rhyme nor reason to them as to why they were doing what they were doing and going where they were going. It just did not register with them. In one case there is pretty good indication that for a decade or so they stayed in what is now called Petra. God never moved that Cloud, and they were within easy walking distance of going into the land within a couple of days. There is no indication in the Bible that they even asked any questions. "Why are we sitting here all this time?"

By the way, that area was not called Petra then, but it was what we call today Petra that they were there. The Israelites made that journey with no clear purpose in mind, but they stayed there long enough to die in the wilderness.

So the question for us here today is, if this were our conversation with the cat, where would you be? We must ask this question because today's religious scene gives one the very definite impression that God does not have a plan beyond only attempting to save us. Is there no purpose beyond that?

Well brethren, God has both a purpose and a plan. It is important that we know who we are and where we are, how we are to get there, and why we go through what we go through. Now would it not be helpful if we had a roadmap so that we would be better prepared to meet the challenges of each part of this pilgrimage? Well, there is a roadmap, and it is contained in the same book we are going through in this sermon.

We are going to make a huge leap all the way to the New Testament, because we want to see, first of all, where the journey begins.

Turn to Matthew 2. This is talking about the birth of Christ.

Matthew 2:14-15 When he [Joseph] arose, he took the young Child and His

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mother by night and departed for Egypt, [they went into Egypt after Christ's birth] and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."

Like every one of us, God calls His people out of Egypt.

We are now going to go to Hosea 11. God is speaking, and He is looking at Israel as a child, or looking back on the time when God called them as a child.

Hosea 11:1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.

This is the verse that was used in Matthew 2, but here in its context right in the book of Hosea, God is seeing Israel—all two or three million, or how many there were—as though it was one person that He called His son. In verse 3 He calls him Ephraim. Ephraim, in a sense, is a code name. Ephraim was the name God gave to the Ten Northern Tribes, and Ephraim was the leading tribe of those Ten Tribes, and so when He uses "Ephraim," He is really talking about Israel—the Ten Northern Tribes.

I mentioned earlier that as God sees things, He is calling all of His sons out of Egypt. So we see that even Jesus Christ was called out of Egypt. We see that Israel was called out of Egypt, and this applies to us, because Egypt is a type of the world that we are called from. That is where our journey begins. That is how closely this analogy applies to you and me.

Now we are going to go back to the book of Exodus. Our pilgrimage begins in spiritual Egypt.

Exodus 2:24-25 So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.

Exodus 3:7 And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows.

Think of Egypt in terms as being a spiritual place rather than a literal nation, and that it applies to you and to me. God has called us to relieve us of our burden, and especially the burden of slavery to Satan the Devil, and God is going to use this time following our calling out of Egypt to get Satan out of us completely and totally.

Let us add another important factor to this, because there is something we must understand and understand thoroughly from the book of Romans regarding our calling.

Romans 9:15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."

Remember, earlier in this sermon I said to you there is a major difference between us and Israel, because He looked at Israel, He looked at them, as we just saw, in a way as if they were only one person—His son. Now God is calling you and me individually—*personally* individually. Just as surely as He called Moses personally and individually, He is calling you and me personally and individually. Just as surely as He called Abraham personally and individually, He is calling you and me personally and individually. I tell you, that is an awesome privilege. The Great God of heaven reaches down, and He sees us in our struggles, and He says, "I am going to release you from that." That is a wonderful thing. He says, "I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Romans 9:16-26 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. [He did not harden us. He softened us.] You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" [For any of us to say that, we must be dumb. We are not thinking.] Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath [those Egyptians in the analogy] prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy [the Israelites; us], which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also

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of the Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved." And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people, ' there they shall be called sons of the living God." **[That is us!]**

The point to be made here is this: God is shown in complete control of His purpose and plan. God initiates our calling because of His faithfulness to His covenant containing His promises to Abraham. It has nothing to do with what we can offer Him, or anything we have already accomplished in life.

Now we are going to go to Ephesians 1. This is one awesome chapter when we stop to really tear it apart. If I remember properly, Mr. Armstrong said this was his favorite chapter in the Bible. Just look at us in our calling.

Ephesians 1:5 Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

It had nothing to do with us, per se. The reason why He called us is completely within Himself.

Ephesians 1:9 Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,

There is almost seven billion people in the world. How many has He actually made His will known to out of that seven billion people? It is a very small number.

Ephesians 1:9 Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,

Ephesians 1:11-12 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Again, let us more fully understand that unlike the Israelites He called out of Egypt, our calling has contained major differences. First, He has called us individually and

personally. In John 6:44, Jesus amplifies this individual aspect. No one comes to the Father except he is drawn. It is just like, "Everybody can receive salvation." Not yet. That time is coming. Right now nobody comes to God unless He personally draws him.

A second thing: Let us fully understand that He has respect unto *His* purpose, not our works or talents. What does a slave have to offer to God's purpose? Technical abilities, craftsmanship? Thank you, but God has already demonstrated in the creation that He does not lack any of these qualities. He puts us to shame.

These two are essential to having the right foundation in our relationship with God, or the relationship will not work well toward growth in God's characteristics. "God gives grace to the humble, but resists the proud." Why does He resist the proud? Because the proud resists *Him*. There is reciprocity there, and we are so insignificant and puny, and yet we are so proud of our puniness even as it leads us to make wrong evaluations and wrong choices again and again. God's rescue of His people begins at *His* set time, and for each person it is the *right* time.

It is hard for us to learn that God knows exactly what He is doing.

We are going to break it off here, because I think it is a good place to do so, and God willing, I will pick this up on the Holy Day.