

Five Major Problems In The Wilderness

A Roadmap of God's Judgments

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Romans 14:10-12 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

This is a sermon covering an overview of God's judgment of Israel during the forty years in the wilderness. I am not going to give a detailed covering of each of them, but it is intended to be a reminder of a principle that is important to us at this time of our life. Part of this principle is that we are, of course, judged individually by God, but we are also judged along with the church, as a body, even as God judged Israel while they were in the wilderness as a body.

We cannot separate ourselves from this because we conduct ourselves—we behave individually—within the body, and it is the accumulative effect of all of those behaviors by all of the people by which God then makes His judgment of the body. We should look at it in two different ways. One is in regard to the church as a body. Is God making any judgments against it? *Has* God made any judgments against it? Were we aware enough to perceive that we had contributed to the judgments that were given against the church, or in behalf of the church?

So we cannot separate ourselves from the body, and we have to think of ourselves that way, and we also have to think of ourselves as being judged individually as well. That is one of the reasons why Paul says "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

I Peter 4:17-18 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

Judgment in this context has two applications, and both need to be considered. One is that we may think of judgment as being something that might be very far off in the

distance somewhat. That is the way most people think of it. That is, they see it as something that is coming on people *after* they die, when actually one of the applications of this scripture here is that it is in process right now. We are being judged actively by God both as individuals, because God judges, we might say, as He goes along, so that there can be course-corrections both in an individual's life, and as a body as well.

A second application is that a judgment can be understood as the sentence that is handed down. "This is my judgment, and because of this such and such is going to occur." When we look at it from *that* standpoint, then it means very possibly that judgment has begun on the body, on the church, in the handing out of a penalty, a sentence, against the church *preceding* the judgments that are going to be made against the world.

Now you know, from the book of Revelation, how bad those judgments are. They are terrifying to think about getting caught within them, and that God is making judgments against His people in carrying out punishments, as it were, against them in advance of, and probably to less of a degree than is going to be made against the world.

We need to consider this also that the kind of judgment that would be handed out against the church in such a case would not necessarily involve the people's salvation, but in many cases just a good spanking, because it is entirely possibly it would not involve our salvation—because we have been justified before God and we still are under the blood of Jesus Christ. As it says in I Corinthians 3, we can suffer loss—that would be a judgment against us—and yet still be saved. So where do we stand right now at this time?

Can you confidently say that what happened after Mr. Armstrong's death, through the eighties and on into the nineties, that a judgment was not being carried out against the church as it blew apart and its people scattered all over and formed themselves in many cases into smaller groups? Certainly smaller in the case of United, Living, Christian Biblical, and the Church of the Great God, and Philadelphia, and others that are maybe a great deal smaller, and maybe confined to only one person's home with a small group of ten or twelve people.

Maybe that is what happened over there in Japan. I do not know. I do not think that we can escape the thought that a judgment—prior to the judgments that are going to be handed out against the world by God to prepare the way for Jesus Christ—was handed out against the church. I think this is actually very clearly seen through the lens mostly of the book of Numbers, which contains a kind of roadmap of the travels of the Israelitish people through what is generally called the wilderness. God handed out

judgments all the way through that period of time. Those judgments were based upon the behavior and the conduct of the Israelitish people as they failed to live up to their part of the covenant.

The focus of this sermon is on an overview of God's judgment against His people, not as individuals (that may come in another sermon), but as a body.

I Peter 2:11-12 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

When any of us is beginning a trip of more than usual driving distance, we almost invariably make sure that we have, at the very least, a roadmap to the location where we want to arrive. This is especially true if we are heading to a destination which we have never been to before.

God makes it clear in a number of places in the New Testament that we are pilgrims. He mentions it right in verse 11. We are sojourners and pilgrims, but Philippians 3:20 makes our detachment to this earth's society even more pronounced by telling us that our citizenship is in heaven, not in any earthly country whatever. God makes it clear right in these two verses that as we walk, He wants us to stand out, to be sanctified by our behavior. That is very clear in verse 12. He undoubtedly does this at least partly in order to help us focus on the job at hand that He has called us to, rather than we permitting ourselves the luxury of frequent side trips to sightsee in this world.

So even in modern Catholicism, people make pilgrimages to Lourdes, and so they make sure that is where they are headed to. You might even say that we make pilgrimages. The Israelites' journey is frequently referred to as a "wandering." However, that concept is not entirely correct. A pilgrim is not a wanderer whatever. A pilgrim knows where he is headed, and he is making the journey for the express purpose of appearing at his destination. When the Muslim pilgrim heads to Mecca, he is headed to Mecca, and he is not going to be deterred until he gets there with the millions of others who are also headed to Mecca.

So even in modern Catholicism, people make pilgrimages to Lourdes and so they make sure that is where they are headed to. You might even say that we make pilgrimages every year. Sometimes it is to Columbia, Missouri. Sometimes it is to Topeka, Kansas,

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or to wherever the Feast of Tabernacles is being held, and that is where we make our journey to, and that is where we want to finish up our pilgrimage.

There is kind of a humorous scene that takes place in *The Ten Commandments* movie. They were going out of Egypt, and Edward G. Robinson was being his recalcitrant self and kind of really snippy, and at one place where everybody was kind of milling around, he turns and says to Joshua, played by John Derek, "Where are we going?" Joshua does not respond in any clear manner, and even later on they kind of give the indication that Moses did not know exactly where they were headed either.

Well, it is my belief that both the real Moses and Joshua surely did know. They knew full well where the Promised Land was because their ancestors migrated to Egypt from there, and it was from there that Jacob and his retinue emigrated, and it was also the place to where God led Abraham generations before. They *knew* where the Promised Land was, and that their pilgrimage, once they left Egypt, was going to end up there. That is the very reason they were taken from Egypt so that they could become settlers in the Promised Land.

However, I think I am also pretty sure that Moses was unaware of the numerous twists and turns their pilgrimage would make, and he was also probably unaware of how many years it would be before arriving there, nor was he aware, I am sure, of the numerous rebellions in Israel's conduct, nor did he know that he would never enter into it [the Promised Land]. So it was mystery there—things that Moses did not know, but he surely knew where they were headed to.

This is speaking of Abraham:

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Ah! Interesting! But on the other hand, in verse 10 it says:

Hebrews 11:10 For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

You put these two statements together, and they almost read like a contradiction. He did not know where he was going, and yet he was looking for something very specific. Now

there is no contradiction, as I will show you in a moment or two, but there is an important principle regarding faith that we always need to remember.

Whenever God called Abraham, none of the promises we know God made to him had been made. No indication of that. He had been reared and conducted his life and business in the great metropolitan centers of his day, and when God called him, he did not know that he was specifically going to Canaan.

If you remember the story, when he started out he went almost directly north. That was where he was led to first. In other words, he was not going toward the land of Canaan yet at all. So he did not know at that time literally where his pilgrimage would end, but he did know, in general, that if God gave him the command to go, it was something good to follow, and thus he trusted the word of the One giving him the command.

In some ways this is similar to exploring, we will say, for gold. A person may have a general idea that there is gold somewhere in “them thar hills” out there, and so he may set out in confidence about finding it, not knowing the exact route of his search, where it was going to take him, and where it would be that he would finally strike gold. So he would have to do some exploring around till he would find it, although he was pretty sure that the general area he was looking in had gold.

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.

To me, the very fact that this verse is part of the record shows me somebody knew where they were going. It also shows me that they expected to cut directly east and a bit north across the wilderness—that is, northeast toward the Promised Land—and that they were struck by the fact that they were not led to go in that way, and understood why they were not led in that way.

That would have been the shortest way to go, and the person, probably Moses, knew that was the shortest way to go, but that it was also one of the more dangerous ways to go. And so it was remarkable that it got into the Bible that “Hey! He didn’t take us that way. He’s really looking out for us. He’s taking us in another direction that’s going to be much safer,” but he would still know they were going to end up in the Promised Land

even though they started out in a way that was not directly toward that direction.

I do not know whether you have thought of it, if you are thinking a little bit ahead of me in trying to think of how this might apply to you and me. We, brethren, are in very much the same position. We know where we are going, do we not? We are headed toward the Kingdom of God, and we know, in the same way that Abraham knew, and we too look for a city whose builder and maker is God, but we do not know the specifics of exactly what the route is going to be that takes us where we know we are going to end up.

You have never been that way before, and neither have I, and so there is a potential that each and every day is going to be somewhat of a surprise. It is not always that way. Once in a while it is that way, but that potential to abruptly go in a different direction at God's direction always remains with us, and we have to keep our mind open to those kinds of changes and continue to live in faith and continue to submit to obey God regardless of which direction it appears as though we are headed.

We are going to go now to I Corinthians 13. See if this does not describe you and me in this kind of situation.

I Corinthians 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy [or we preach] in part.

Every preacher that gets before you only knows in part. He is at a certain level of development in his life, and he gives of what he is receiving from God. But we do not see things anywhere near as clearly as God does. That is for sure. We can only pass to you what we have learned from our experiences in our relationship with God.

I Corinthians 13:9-10 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

I Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

Hindsight is sometimes even perfect maybe, or it comes about as close as we can get to perfect, looking at things after they have occurred. But there is very much, brethren, about this way of life we do not know, and this demands that we live by faith because the potential remains every day to face a situation in a way, from a perspective, from an

angle that we have never had to face before.

Now funnel this thought right back into the Israelites. They had never been that way before, and every day, following that Cloud had the potential to put them into a situation that they found themselves very uncomfortable with, especially considering that in most cases they did not have anywhere near the blessings of the gift of faith that we have. What would that have done to their behavior? What would that have done to their conduct? It is very easy for us to look back at them and hold them to an accounting for which they were really not capable.

We understand intellectually that God did not give them His Spirit, but I do not think it would be good for us to judge them unfairly because of their behavior, which was not very good most of the time. It was not acceptable at all by the kind of judgments God made, that He was not pleased even with the low-level that He might have expected from them.

Let us bring that forward to us now. Using that same principle, we too, brethren, are in our own kind of wilderness. It is spiritual. The Hebrew word translated “wilderness” simply means a place where people do not live. Nothing complicated about that. If no one lived there, there may not even have been any roads for them to follow. And even if there had been, the Cloud may not have followed them, but gone off in its own direction.

Do you not think that this would have thrown them into consternation, and do you not think that would cause them to have attitude problems that would trigger behavior problems? You had better believe that it would. “What kind of life is this that we’ve been led into?” Very unexpected. Again, coming to us, we are very much, in a sense, in uncharted territory within our own life. In some ways we ought to be familiar with this principle.

Had you ever been a teenager until you became one? You never experienced the fluctuations in your hormones and whatever until you actually got to those years and began to be confronted by circumstances that you never thought of before.

Let us move rapidly forward there about fifteen or twenty years. You were never middle-age until you became middle-age, and then had to confront the changes in life that occur during middle-age when your body is just beginning to show signs that it is wearing down, that it is wearing out, and it does not have the energy that it had before. Your hair is falling out, and whatever. See, you get the point.

When you add the spiritual factor to it, we have to start going through these new

situations in life with the added responsibility of having the Spirit of God. And just because we have the Spirit of God, it does not necessarily mean that going through those new situations is going to be any easier. It may actually complicate especially our sense of responsibility to God, and impact on us in a very stressful way. Ask me about it!

I am 77 years old. I have never been 77 before, and I will tell you, the body is wearing out. When I get sick it does not bounce back like it did before, and it can throw me into a bad attitude when I think that 20 years ago I bounced right back, but it does not happen now. Those kinds of circumstances we would like to think would never affect us in a negative way, but brethren, they do, and we have to deal with them.

One of the sums of this is that we have to clearly understand and expect the fact that we walk to the beat of a different drummer. We walk by faith and not by sight, and therefore, brethren, there is often nothing visible to guide us. Faith is needed where we do not possess what we have. Faith is needed when we cannot see exactly what it is that we are to do. Instead we have to conduct our life trusting Someone we cannot see, but yet proclaim to others that we believe what His Word says, and believe that He is working in our life.

I recall reading in a biography about President Harry Truman's life a statement that was attributed to him. He said, "There is nothing new in the world except the history you do not know." That was sort of a takeoff on Solomon's "There is nothing new under the sun." What President Truman meant is that name and location throughout history change, but the events are always the same. There may be some minor differences in them, but the events are always basically the same, and so he was saying that history keeps repeating itself.

God never changes. Satan never changes, and neither does human nature ever change. Do you know what this does? It makes the Bible always relevant, regardless of when and where people live. So God can write about the children of Israel in the wilderness, and it applies to you and me today. Even though the location is not the same, and even though the spiritual circumstances are not the same, there is enough there that is similar that we can look in the first five books, and we can learn a very great deal about our way that otherwise would not be visible to us. If we are converted and we are really living by faith, it gives us a roadmap so that we are able to reach that destination that is set before us.

Let us go to I Corinthians 10. Everybody knows that we are in the midst of this book that the apostle Paul apparently wrote right before the Days of Unleavened Bread, so very

much in this book pertains to the Days of Unleavened Bread, and so it is a perfect setup, one might say, for sermons of this nature.

Look at what Paul wrote here.

I Corinthians 10:1-7 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."

Notice how Paul listed these things. It is kind of interesting to think, "Why did Paul put them in this order?" Maybe lusting was, at least in Paul's mind, the number one evil that they did during that period of time. Maybe they looked upon that time as really a time of great privation, and their minds could conjure up all kinds of things that they desired, and they allowed those things that were in their mind to then determine their behavior, which was generally pretty rebellious.

I Corinthians 10:8-13 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

All of these events except one are ones Paul took from the book of Numbers, and that book is very close to being a roadmap for those of us journeying in the wilderness of this world, and it is given so we would, at the very least, have an overview of what to expect on our walk. I am pretty sure that is why I Corinthians 10 is in there, that this is a general

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guideline from God for anybody who lived at any time after the Israelites lived, that these things would most likely be the things that would trip us up and cause us to stumble as we went through.

So remember, we are individual entities being judged individually according to our works; but collectively we are also a body that is moving toward a goal. Sometimes our trials are individual ones, and sometimes the trials are of the body, and we are judged according to our reaction and contribution to the body's trial.

The book of Numbers overall theme has been described as "wilderness wandering." Because Moses wrote of the significant event as Israel moved toward the Promised Land, it could also be titled "God's Judgments"—His judgments on Israel as they walked their walk. The reason we can do that is because that is frequently what He is showing in the book of Numbers. He shows the event, and this is the way He judged.

Just like He said there, they committed fornication, and 23,000 people died. That was a judgment made against them. So what He is frequently showing then through the book is for the kind of pitfalls that we, if we are observing things correctly—looking, reading, studying, meditating on—can use as a roadmap, prepare ourselves, and avoid doing what the Israelites did. But that roadmap is not of a geographic territory, but a spiritual, moral, governmental, and social territory significant for our understanding and development as we make our pilgrimage.

Through these situations, God was getting these people prepared for living in the land, and through our walk through our personal wilderness, He is getting us prepared for the Kingdom of God. I hope you are not missing the point here. *The book of Numbers is a roadmap.* This is what you want to read, and this is what you want to understand. You want to understand the events that occurred, the sins that tripped them up, and the judgments that God made, and He is so nice as to list five of them one right after another that really caused them trouble, beginning with lust, idolatry, and so forth.

Please understand that we are going to go through them to some extent, but these are not blow-by-blow accounts, but each one of them was significant enough of occurrence in its own right, but the sins involved in many cases overlapped with other events. Some of them were actually kind of chained together. One event led right into another, and almost compounded the problems they were having with one, and then on to another.

Let us go back to the book of Numbers.

Numbers 9:17-21 Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the

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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 LOORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LOORD 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 LOORD and did not journey. So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of the LOORD they would remain encamped, and according to the command of the LOORD 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.

Can you imagine that? You know how hard it is for you to go on a trip. They just spent the whole day moving, camped, got up in the morning and off again they went. We are talking about millions of people. This was no easy dance God put them through. I think I mentioned to you in a commentary the other day that God kept the people of Israel on edge, and He did that for a very significant reason. He never wanted to allow them to get settled down so much that they would not trust Him to get the strength they would need to do what they needed to do.

You can put that into your bag and understand that it is very likely that none of you are going to get rich. You will get your manna, and the water will come out of the rock every once in a while, but there are going to be some dry times. There are going to be times when you will not have a job. There are going to be times when money is going to be scarce (like most of the time!). God is going to keep us on edge, and there is a loving purpose in that, because when we are on edge and we believe in Him, we are going to get on our knees and we are going to talk to Him and ask Him to supply whatever it is we need, physically or spiritually, to go on for this day. Jesus said to pray every day for your daily bread. He meant it, which means that we are going to be kept on edge day by day. That is actually a loving purpose.

Numbers 9:22-23 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 LOORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LOORD they journeyed; they kept the charge of the LOORD, at the command of the LOORD by the hand of Moses.

These six or seven verses we just read establish a principle for you and me that God established through them, and that is this: God actively leads His people. He *actively* does it. He has not gone way off somewhere. As we see here, sometimes they remained in camp for a whole year—a whole settled period there. “Boy, I’m getting to like this. I just grew my beans and everything, and whoops! Well, I have to leave my beans because He suddenly decided to go on.” But can we accept those things that occur in our life that may upset us because God decided, that for us, He has moved the Cloud?

God actively leads His people, whether as individuals or as a group, and He is doing both masterfully at the same time—moving all these pieces on the chessboard around in order that both the church, and we as individuals, reach the end of our pilgrimage prepared as God wants us to be prepared. He has to do both at the same time. It is a masterful job, but God is a hands-on God. He is not detached from His work, *and we are His work*. He is working salvation in all the earth, and judgment is now on the house of God.

Understand—and understand it thoroughly—that God does not judge us to condemn us. If we are under the blood of Jesus Christ, that justification is covering us. We can destroy that justification by failing to submit to Him, but God does judge us for the purpose of correcting us so that we move in the direction He wants us to move in. He also corrects us to give us understanding, because He wants to see where we stand, and He wants to promote our growth, and He wants to save us. We can expect, that along with the church as a body, we are also going to be judged and corrected individually and so forth as well. It is His will to save us if we will allow Him. We are the only ones who can stop Him if we decide we do not want that.

Let us touch on something else.

I Peter 1:17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.

God judges all from top to bottom without respect to persons. He is not impressed by man the way we tend to be. His judgments are absolutely righteous because they are made without favoritism, without prejudice, a lack of fact, a lack of discernment, or whatever. All of these things are inherent in men’s judgment, but not in God’s. Above all, brethren, He is merciful and very patient as well, and He has power to change our mind.

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He knows how to tighten the screws exactly as they need to be tightened for each of us as individuals.

So when God judges, please understand that it is not to condemn us. It always is to make course directions though, and it is always done to develop within us understanding.

Let us go to Psalm 11. It is interesting the way David put God's judgment.

Psalm 11:4-6 The LOORD is in His holy temple, the LOORD's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The LOORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup.

Nothing escapes God's piercing judgment. That is the way David put it in the Old Testament. Let us go to the way Paul (or whoever wrote Hebrews) put it in the New Testament.

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

We read very early in this sermon how that everybody has to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and Christ is our Judge. Now we are finding in His perception of our life, as individuals or as a body, that nothing escapes His gaze. When we add to this fact that God is a hands-on God, that He is actively involved in the lives of His children and that nothing escapes Him, we can be very aware that in His loving mercy He is leading us toward His Kingdom.

Let us start looking at the judgments. All of these I think are going to be ones that are quite familiar to you.

Numbers 11:33-34 But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LOORD was aroused against the people, and the LOORD struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of

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that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.

This is a judgment that came upon an un-numbered group. God does not tell us in this case how many. It came upon them because they lusted. If we will look at that in its spiritual type, then they were lusting for the kind of spiritual diet they had in Egypt. Remember, I said to you earlier that these sins tended to feed into one another. Now here we had them lusting for food, literal food.

We are to eat of Jesus Christ, and when we kept Passover the other evening, that was what we were doing. We were eating at His table, and He was the host, and He was the meal as well. But these people were lusting after something that did not have to do with God's way at all. What they were doing is they were rejecting as dull, boring, and plain the diet that God supplied.

That was quite a condemnation, if we think of it in spiritual terms, which is the way we are to think of it. We are not in that kind of environment they were in, in which they were actually lusting after food, but what do you think personally of God's spiritual food? Is it something you look upon that is boring to read? Is it something you would rather just set aside until you are in the mood?

There might always be times when there is something else that could be taken into the mind, everything from movies, detective stories, or whatever. The mind just loves those kinds of things. The idea here is not to condemn reading a fictional book, but rather it is to make a comparison in our own mind as to what really stirs us and gives us spiritual energy—the kind of food we need to traverse our spiritual wandering. Which is it? What is it we desire? What is it we lust after? Now God put these people to death. I am not saying God is going to put us to death because we do something like that, but it is a comparison we have to make in our life.

Numbers 14:36-37 Now the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a bad report of the land, those very men who brought the evil report about the land, died by the plague before the LORD.

This is a judgment that was made against tribal leaders because they gave an exaggerated report against the great promise and faithfulness of God. What just popped into my mind was Jesus telling Peter, "Get you behind Me, Satan!" Because the thought

Peter spoke—though it was done in *his* mind because he did not like what Christ was saying about having to die—what actually came out of his mouth was anti-God's purpose which was to bring about the death of Jesus Christ, and Peter was actually speaking against that. In that case it was against the great promise and faithfulness of God to provide a way for sins to be forgiven.

In this case the people said, "Boy, it's a good-looking land all right, but the trials of overcoming the present residents and their fortified cities isn't worth making. They're too strong, and they're too entrenched, and we will be overcome." So they had a very severe lack of faith.

Numbers 14:32-35 But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. I the LORD have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die."

All of those over twenty were held accountable and judged because they believed this evil report. Now was God unfair? The very fact that Joshua and Caleb were *not* judged the same way shows that God was judging each person individually. If He was judging everybody in the body with the same paintbrush, those two would have died as well, but He set them apart.

What is the lesson? It is obvious. God wants us to hold our faith regardless of the way the crowd is going, even in the midst of other church members. Those twenty and over who were condemned were people who were just going along with the church, in today's lingo, but what we always have to think of and always take into consideration is personal responsibility. That is the lesson there. God holds us accountable personally.

Now we are going to go to Numbers 16. This is a very well-known judgment God made.

Numbers 16:1-3 Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation,

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representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LOORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LOORD?"

When those men made that charge against Moses, what they said was partly correct. All the congregation of Israel was holy, but not everybody was holy or set apart or sanctified in exactly the same way, but they did not take that into consideration in their judgment.

Numbers 16:28-35 And Moses said: "By this you shall know that the LOORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the LOORD has not sent me. But if the LOORD creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the LOORD." [Not just Moses and Aaron, but rejected the Lord]. Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up also!" And a fire came out from the LOORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

In this case, the judgment was made against the people who were in the ministry. As we would say today, they were elders in the church. They did not have the highest position there, but they had a position that was indeed higher than the overwhelming majority of the people of Israel. So the judgment was made against them, and those who sympathized with them in their attack against Moses, which was viewed by God as an attack against Him because their attack against Moses was a rejection of God's judgment as to who it was who should hold the positions Moses and Aaron were given.

What was their big mistake? They really did not see God in the picture. All they saw was the man Moses and the man Aaron, and they could probably point out a number of problems those men had, whether it was personal problems of theirs, or maybe

problems with their family, or whatever, that to them opened up for them in their pride to say, "I am just as good as you. All of the children in Israel are holy." They used a truth to reach a very bad conclusion.

So remember this: Jesus Christ is Judge of His church. That is a very important point to remember. This is actually emphasized in quite a number of cases in Jesus' ministry where He told people, "If you accept Me, you accept the Father." "If you accept My agent, you accept Me and you accept My Father." Do you see the way God looked at it? Those whom He has appointed, there is an unbroken line between Him and the person appointed, and so to reject the person He appointed is also to reject God. Bad business. So the advice is, "Think before you act."

Even the apostle Paul walked into that one, where he did not recognize the high priest. Maybe the man was not wearing his uniform, or whatever, but Paul spoke to the high priest very sharply, and bang! He got whacked on the jaw; and then he apologized very quickly, but he was guilty, and I think God straightened him out there in the book of Acts. Paul spoke out of turn, and he was very quickly corrected. God corrects apostles too.

Numbers 20:2 Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.

Numbers 20:8-13 "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals." So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." This was the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel contended with the LORD, and He was hallowed among them.

God mercifully supplied the water, and there is no doubt at all that Moses was really aggravated to the end, we would think, of his patience. He had to deal with this

recalcitrant people who were always on the edge of blowing up, and the poor man could probably hardly ever turn to the left or to the right without being called into account for which way he turned.

God supplied the water which they indeed needed, but He really laid it on Moses. Moses lost his temper, and he lost his temper because his faith wavered for a period of time, and he doubted in that he did not speak to the rock as God said to him, and instead, he hit the rock twice. If that rock represented Christ, it was just like whacking Jesus Christ with his staff. Pretty bold move! Moses had to live with his failure. God judged him. It did not matter how high his rank was. In this case God hit Moses right where it really hurt, and Moses had to live with that the rest of his life. If God had struck him dead, I do not think it would have had the same impact on Moses' character as to take away from him that strong fervent desire he had to walk in the land. That really stung!

So many times I think of the verbal abuse that Herbert Armstrong took at the lips of people in the church. I do not think Herbert Armstrong was any Moses, but still, God had appointed him head of that work, and therefore he should have been respected because He was God's appointed to that position. I often wonder what is going to be the fate of the people who have really called him into account over so many things that he was nowhere even guilty of.

God punishes those He actually calls and appoints to their positions as well. Again, this fits right into the preceding point, and that is, God judges all through Jesus Christ, and He can take care of the sins and errors of those who are apostles, prophets, or whatever.

We will not go through Numbers 22 and 25, but there we find God punishes the persecutors of His work as well. This is that section that involves Balaam and Balak when they tried their hardest to curse Israel, but Balak and Balaam were thwarted at every turn.

Let us go back to I Corinthians 10 once again. I want you to think through this series of events involving Balak and Balaam why God was judging them. In this case His judgments were to protect Israel from the worst, at least, of what those evil men were trying to do.

In I Corinthians 10 we are going to take a look a little bit more closely at how Paul used the Exodus experience of Israel, in this case a little bit more specifically, even to the point of drawing attention to baptism in verses 1 and 2. Being baptized into Moses, as

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verse 2 shows there, signifies that these people were members of the Old Covenant.

He very forcefully reinforces this in verse 11 when he said that all these things happened to them as examples to us. The Cloud signifies both guidance and protection. What we have to grasp and make use of is that though God is a hands-on God, and He guides and protects us even as individual agents. We are still free moral agents. All we have to do to get proof of that is to look at all the trouble Israel got into by wrongly using their free moral agency.

In I Corinthians 10:4 this makes it abundantly clear that there is a spiritual source supplying our needs.

I Corinthians 10:4 And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

Christ draws upon this in John 6, that He is the true bread, the true food that came down from heaven.

Verse 5 of I Corinthians 10 is a stunning warning that is given to all who have made the New Covenant. Most of the original group that made the Old Covenant with God died without reaching the Promised Land.

I Corinthians 10:5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

That ought to get just about everybody's attention, and if there is, to me, anything that indicates that this Eternal Security doctrine the world so greatly relies upon is not true, it certainly must be the experiences God had with Israel in the wilderness.

God gave them promises that He would supply all their needs, and that He would plant them in the Promised Land. That was His promise, and He followed through to the extent that they would permit Him to follow through, but they did not permit Him, and how many people out of the original group made it? God only names two. It is very likely that those under twenty, and very possibly others made it, but of the original group *over* twenty, the only ones that made it were Joshua and Caleb.

Regarding verse 5, most of the modern translations use the word "scattered." My *KJV* says "they were *overthrown* in the wilderness." What is so interesting is what that word

“overthrown” means. It indicates that God took action against someone fighting Him, and He defeated them. It can even be translated “strewn,” but whichever way it is translated, the original Hebrew word means “something being tossed aside.”

I want you to think about that. Remember, this is God’s Word, and those who refused to submit to Him were tossed aside. That is pretty harsh. That is the way God’s judgment was. It is almost like garbage. “They aren’t worth it.”

Remember, God the Rock, mentioned in verse 4, is the same One with whom we have to do. He was the One—this Jesus Christ that Richard was telling us about in his sermon, and what His view of sin is. His view is not like what most people think of. To Him, sin is something that is extremely hateful and abhorrent, and those, who determined by their conduct, did not like to live within the standards of Jesus Christ, He just tossed them aside as if they were nothing. But those people made that choice.

There is something here that I want you to consider. Have you ever stopped to think what witnesses these people’s dying was to those who remained alive? I want to you to consider this. The figures I am going to give you are really on the conservative side. You might recall the original census that was made of those fighting men only as they were coming out. This means that they were probably between the ages of 20 and 50. It might even have been fewer years than that, but 603,550 men are what comprised Israel’s army.

Let us assume that there were an equal number of women the same ages. So that is another 603,550 people. The armies really have fighting men above age 50. How long did people live then? They lived about as long as we live today. They lived until they were 70 or 80 years old. You have to begin factoring in several hundred thousand more men and several hundred thousand more women. So we will say 300 thousand, and that adds up to another 600 thousand people. We did not even consider the number of ones who were under the age of 20, but that brings us to somewhere around a million and a half people, at the very least.

Now researchers who do research on how long a generation is and how many children would be produced and so forth, they feel that a conservative number of Israelites leaving Egypt was somewhere around two and one-half million. I am only talking about a million and a half people. They say two and one-half million plus, and some will even go as high as six million people left Egypt whenever Israel did.

Even using only one million five hundred thousand people (1,500,000), I want you to divide that by 13,879. Do you know why that figure? Because that is the number of days

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there are in 38 years after the event there in Numbers 14. Do you know how many people they had to bury every day? At least 108 people died every day. That is only using a figure of a million and a half people, when the figure was probably closer to three million people, which would double it, and then over 200 people a day were dying in the wilderness, we will say of natural causes, and that is why Paul said “their bodies were strewn all over the place because of sin.”

Because they would not submit whenever they had a witness, every day the manna was on the ground, and God was with them, and God was providing for them, and another 110 or 220 people died that day just like the day before, and they still would not submit!

Were these people thinking about God? Were they thinking about cause and effect? Were they thinking about that great goal that lay before them, and that they really, truly wanted to be there because they believe that God?

No, they did not, and so for the next 38 years God continued to give His judgments, showing them, and now you and me, how abhorrent it is to accept His forgiveness, His freedom, and then to turn our backs on Him by failing to give our life in the New Covenant.