

Our Merciful And Faithful Provider

John W. Ritenbaugh

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We will begin this sermon by turning to I Peter 2, verses 9 and 10. It is obvious to whom Peter is writing.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

A grasp of history is important to every generation because it gives one a sense of identity. If you know who you are, and where you came from, you will have an easier time discovering what you should be doing. A person without identity is like a person without a birth certificate, a name, an address, or a family. If we do not have historic roots, we become like tumbleweeds that are blown here and there, and never arriving at their destination. This is very similar to those who float, on whom I spoke earlier. They truly do not know who they are in life.

The cynic claims that all we can learn from history is that we do not learn from history. Now much of the Bible is history, but the Bible's history is anything but boring to those who are keenly interested in it. It is a *living* drama, living words that teach us about God and encourages us to obey and to enjoy His blessings. No book is more contemporary than the Bible. Each person has to learn this important lesson. Moses wrote *living* words from which we learn our place in history.

Let us go back in time and pages to Genesis 11 to another exciting time in history.

Genesis 11:2-4 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

This is meaningful for our time, and it is because of these very times we live in. We need to touch bases with what happened there in Babylon. We live in a time of great technological development by mankind. In fact, as far as we know, a time unprecedented in the history of mankind. Electronic technology is leading the way, seemingly making the world smaller, and thus drawing people together.

Now we live in the Commonwealth Nation Britain and in the United States of America—the nation that is leading the world to accomplishing what is happening right now. I do want you to look at a series of verses in Deuteronomy 33 regarding this. Deuteronomy 33 is Moses', we will call it, "fore-view" in prophecy of what is going to happen in the Israelitish nation. We will begin in verse 13. Listen to these words.

Deuteronomy 33:13-17 And of Joseph he said: "Blessed of the LORD is his land, with the precious things of heaven, with the dew, and the deep lying beneath, with the precious fruits of the sun, with the precious produce of the months, with the best things of the ancient mountains, with the precious things of the everlasting hills, with the precious things of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush. [Maybe the greatest gift of all!] Let the blessing come 'on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.' His [Joseph's] glory is like a firstborn bull, and his horns like the horns of the wild ox; [There is a picture of strength, of international power.]; Together with them he [Joseph] shall push the peoples to the ends of the earth; They are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh."

Joseph is pushing the world's population. Whether it is by economic power, or military power, or whatever kind of power it is, Joseph is doing something. He is rearranging the order of nations as we reach the time of the end.

Rapid transportation is adding to this element as well as contributing to the "running to and fro" that is prophesied in Daniel 12:4. There are international linkages between police forces, universities, and economic systems promoting cooperation for mutual benefit. This is the same basic thing that was happening in Genesis 11.

Nations are no longer sovereign and separate as they once were. Each nation would very much like to retain its independence, but they are seeking agreements with each other out of necessity in order to survive the economic, military, and political pressures of this shrinking world's system. Instead, unions of nations are forming—unions like the North American Union, the European Union, and the Mediterranean Union. There is an Oriental Union forming, and a Muslim Union, as another example. Biblically, we know them as "the Beast," the King of the South, the King of the North, and God's Army of Joel 2.

That is not the only thing that is happening. We find in the book of Matthew, chapter 24, that Jesus prophesied a number of things. What Jesus prophesied was of a very dangerous world that is going to form at the time just before His return, and so He says the following in Matthew 24:21-22.

Matthew 24:21-22 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

This is what confronts us, and many indicators signal that we are getting very close to its being triggered. The pressures of the time are already difficult as the world's economies weaken, and when economies weaken, this historically has been a precursor of war. It is not far off. Wars are *always* fought over some form of wealth. One of these is oil. Now one of the big wealth issues to fight over is water.

The world is running out of water suitable for drinking and watering agriculture. People are already predicting that wars are going to be fought over water in many parts of the world. These things will produce fearful times, because leaders in such circumstances always look for individuals and groups that they can blame and use to stir their loyalty against. Again, history has shown us that people

calling themselves "Christians"—whether or not they really were or are—have historically been easy targets.

Two things are of special interest here as we think about these times. One is that surveillance of individual British and American citizens by governmental agencies has magnified by leaps and bounds so that it is now at the place where it rivals what was prophesied in the book *1984* and its "Big Brother" imagery.

The second is, that little by little, laws regarding police powers and citizens' rights before the law have been gradually altered so that now in the United States anybody can be jailed and held indefinitely merely on the suspicion of a police authority that the person is subversive. The key word there would be "indefinitely." It would be for as long as *they* determine. It has already been written to be done. All we need is the circumstances.

Jeremiah 30:5-6 "For thus says the LORD: 'We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask now, and see, whether a man is ever in labor with child? . . .

That would really be weird. What he is describing here is something that is equally weird and far more dangerous.

Jeremiah 30:6-7 . . . So why do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor, and all faces turned pale? Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it;

We are headed for a time that has never been before. Even the days of Noah will not compare to what lies ahead of us. I do not know how close we are. *Nobody* knows how close we are, or how far we are. We only know that we are seeing indication of things we feel would lead in that direction.

Jeremiah 30:7 Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it.

What I am getting at here is that we are right on the edge of the time capable of producing in us a great deal of fear, despite the fact that we may intellectually know well that God promises to deliver Israel, and He also promises to deliver His church. But is that knowledge workable within us? That is the issue. Will we use it?

The knowledge is there. I have no doubt about it at all, but when Israel approached the Promised Land at the end of the second year, *they* had knowledge. God said, "There is the land," but they did not follow through. Do we want to emulate what they did, or do we want to do more like what the second group of Israelites did thirty-eight years later? Ah! That is the way we want to be, because they submitted. We will be seeing more of that a little bit later.

Let us move forward to the New Testament to the book of Romans to another very familiar Scripture as we continue to lay a foundation. This particular Scripture is the one we want to build on.

Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before [meaning those things in the Old Testament] were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

The challenge is, which group of Israelites are we going to follow?

Many parallels exist between us, the church, and the Israelites. That is one reason I began in I Peter 2, because God said virtually the same words to Israel in the book of Deuteronomy, that they were a chosen nation, a special people, holy unto the Lord.

He set us off too so that we know our position before Him, but it remains for us to live by faith. In order to support that faith, what He has done is cause the experiences of Israel, the histories of Israel, to be written in His word so that we can look back on them. Not just Deuteronomy, but everywhere, because there were all kinds of circumstances Israel had in their relationship with God. God faithfully put them there so that we would know how He acted and reacted in relation to what they were doing.

We must never forget that God reveals Himself through His word and through His acts. Both are recorded in the Old Testament. "Now faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Therefore God is telling us that what is written in the Old Testament is intended to build our faith so that we might *live* by that faith and have hope.

One commentator called Deuteronomy "the longest farewell address in the history of the earth." And it is. It took Moses thirty years to get it out! Even we would get tired listening to that, but he broke it up into thirty days. He would write, and then he would preach. What we are looking at there are sermons—the essence of the sermons he gave to those people. He may have spoken each time a great deal longer than it would take us to read any given chapter. They were sermons, and God saved and preserved them for us the essence of what Moses said, because it was important to God's purpose that we understand what Moses related to the children of Israel and their successes and their failures.

The "fear and faith" issue fits right into the way God, through Moses, addressed Israel at the very beginning. And so what He says at the very beginning is the foundation upon which the whole rest of the book of Deuteronomy is built. Everything proceeds from what he put in chapter 1, and chapter 2, and chapter 3.

We are going to go to Deuteronomy 1. I am going to be repeating some of the things Richard went through ["Are We Ready To Enter The Promised Land?"]. I did not know what he was preparing, and he did not know what I was preparing, so I confidently go forward in this, saying that God wants us to hear some parts of it again. I will not do it the way Richard did. I have my own way and he has his own way. I will probably hit a few things he did not hit on. We will begin with verse 6 and read through verse 8.

Deuteronomy 1:6-8 "The LORD our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: 'You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. Turn and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites, to all the neighboring places in the plain, in the mountains and in the lowland, in the South and on the seacoast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the River Euphrates. See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give to them and their descendants after them.'

We must never forget that "the just will live by faith," and therefore knowledge of God and His way and of His word must be used. It is also a statement of fact, and we will use the knowledge contained in Deuteronomy to provide a foundation for *our* relationship with God. That is exactly what He wants. It is the foundation of the relationship—a relationship lived in faith, if we will just do it.

It is also a statement of fact that Christianity, by Jesus' own witness, is difficult. He said "the way is straight [meaning difficult] and narrow." In other words, it squeezes us in. It does not permit us liberties that the world may seem to have. But there is a good purpose behind this, and that is, as we are squeezed in and narrowed down, that is what creates a Christian who is going to be in the Kingdom of God.

Human nature wants to run wild in every direction, and it will go as far as its owner will allow it to go. But we have to be controlled so that we stay within the hedges. The verse in Proverbs 22:6, where it says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," is better translated "*narrow* a child in the way he should go." That is what God is doing with us. He is narrowing us in so that we are going in the direction in which He wants us to go. But we have to respond in faith, trusting Him that this *is* the way He wants us to go.

Be reminded that many, many Psalms deal with the authors confronting their fears in desperate circumstances, and many of the Bible stories deal with warfare, persecution, and even martyrdom of some of the stories' heroes. Now fear is not uncommon in a Christian's life. Understand that. It is not unusual to be afraid.

God recounts that the 38-year journey from Sinai to the edge of the Promised Land was not easy. When the second group arrived on its border they still had to cross the homeland of the Amorites before entering the land. What I want to get at is this. As bad as the wilderness was, meeting the Amorites was worse. In other words, as they approached the end of the journey, the problems intensified. That is why I began the way I did, picking up on Jeremiah 30, how that we are headed toward a time that will be the worst in mankind's history.

We are reaching the end of our journey to the Kingdom of God, and difficulties are intensifying, and living by faith is going to become ever more important. Look how separated we are now from what we had been in the Worldwide Church of God when most of us were participants, fellowshiping in congregations that were pretty large. I pastored a congregation that had 1200 people in it, and now I have pastored congregations with two.

Believe it or not, I preached a funeral sermon where only one person was there; that is, besides the dead person, and that was in populous Orange County, California. This poor woman who died was alone in the world except for one man, so I preached just like I was preaching to you, giving the funeral sermon.

What I am saying is that circumstances are not always the same, but there are generalities that are the same in God's word. One of these generalities is that, as we get toward the end of our pilgrimage, God is going to crank up the intensity of our training and preparation for the Kingdom of God because He wants to make sure we are going to live by faith.

In the sermonette I tried to get across to you just a tiny bit of understanding of the power that is going to be given to us ["Energy is Wealth"]. To control and rightly use that power is going to require a mind that is self-controlled and not just flying all over the place in bitterness, hatred, self-pity, self-indulgence, or whatever. It has got to be directed in the way that would give God pleasure and His approval.

Now is our time of testing, and so as we get to the end, it is going to be more difficult. That is a promise from Him. He is doing it for His sake and for our sake at the same time. He has got to be

sure. He created spirit beings—angels—and one-third of those angels was disloyal. Even though they were of spirit composition, they proved they could not be trusted.

You can see, in a sense, that He has a great deal invested in us. He wants to make sure of His investment in us, and so He is moving to protect us by allowing us to go through a difficulty where we are going to live by faith, or else. It does not mean we will live it perfectly, but He wants to see what our reaction is. So the fear issue is a reality.

I want to go back to Genesis 15, verses 15 and 16. God is speaking to Abraham, telling him what is going to happen to his progeny.

Genesis 15:15-16 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they [Abraham's descendants] shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

What we run into in Deuteronomy 1 is the descendants of the Amorites. The Amorites must have had a particularly bad reputation for really being a nasty and vicious people with a proclivity for savagery in warfare. And now here is Israel, right on their doorstep, and the Amorites' iniquity is at its worst ever. It was now full. It was the worst it had ever been.

Notice in Deuteronomy 1:20-21 what Moses said.

Deuteronomy 1:20-21 And I said to you, 'You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.

Moses is telling them, "The land is already yours. March in and take possession of it." But as we learned, in order to encourage them further, he takes their suggestion to send men out to make a surveillance of the land, and when the men return with their report, all twelve of them at first said, "It is a good land." They all liked it, but ten of them became persuaded otherwise.

Deuteronomy 1:26-32 "Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; and you complained in your tents, and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, "The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.'" "Then I said to you, 'Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.' Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God,

It is interesting that God first gives us, you might say, an evil report—a report of people who failed, and why they failed. They failed because their fear overrode what they knew about God, His word, and His promises. Their faith failed.

There is no doubt that one of their arguments to support their rebellion is that they were not trained for war. That certainly is true, but God almost always brings us to comfort issues for which we are not fully trained *yet*. Did you ever stop to think of this, that if you had been through this before, and you conquered it before, and maybe you conquered it before many times, what kind of challenge is there for you to face in a case like that? There is little, if any.

So God always brings us up against a trial which we feel is formidable enough that we are not trained for, in order to begin to produce fear to see whether we will cast that fear aside because of trust in Him, that regardless of how difficult it looks, He is going to bring us through.

We might fumble the ball all the way through, but we reach the other side. That is the point. Faith is built in exercises where the answer is in doubt. That is how it is hardened. Now it may not be in doubt intellectually, but it is in doubt in experience. He wants us to experience going through that problem we think is too big by calling upon Him to bring us through it, and then maybe even timidly we go forward; but we go. That is the important thing. We go and do it.

Do you remember the Scripture we just read in Romans 15:4—"That we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope"? Now faith comes by hearing. So does understanding come by hearing. Striving to follow the examples is what polishes faith and makes it perfect. So every one of us has to answer this question. Have we truly accepted the gift God has given? The gift for them was the land. The gift for us is eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

It would seem to me, if we have not truly accepted it, we will provide ourselves with justification just like the Israelites did, to not move forward, and it is not the reality in our knowledge that we think it is, and so the test proves that it is not a reality in the way it needs to be.

Now consider this aspect. God's gift to us is the future, but it is not merely *our* future, it is His. Think of this from His point of view. It is His future because He has called us, He has begotten us as His children, and He wants to share that future *with* us. So when we let Him down by letting our fears override our faith, we are actually taking part of His future away from Him. I am sure, that because of the way He feels toward us, and we have had plenty of examples in the sermons of how much He loves us, that hurts *Him*. He is not without feeling hurt, and it saddens Him when someone who should make it turns back, not trusting Him.

Let us look at verse 21 again.

Deuteronomy 1:21 Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you.

It is that phrase—"The LORD God of your fathers." What I am thinking of here of course is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Did God ever fail Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob? He did not, because it is not in His nature to fail. But they are examples to us that God always comes through for those who trust Him, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did.

Can you think of how difficult it might have been for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to envision the fulfillment of the promises made to them? They did not live in the kind of circumstance that we do where I think it is probably easier for us to envision a more beautiful, perfect world than the one we live in, because, compared to what they lived in, their world was pretty good in some ways. We

ought to be able to envision things along that line much better. But again, the record—God's word—shows that they persevered nonetheless. They faced their fears, so why cannot we face our fears?

Let us go back to another very familiar Scripture in the New Testament. Go to I Corinthians 10, which is very similar in structure to Romans 15:4.

I Corinthians 10:11 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.

I Corinthians 10:13 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.

God never changes. He does not play dirty games with peoples' emotions and understanding. He did not overburden Israel with this challenge, and therefore we have an example of their experiences to add to our faith. God will be faithful to *us*.

Now what was their underlying problem? There might be a number of different directions in which we could go and point the finger toward, but there is one particular Psalm I want to go to because God puts His finger on this in Psalm 78. I believe Martin used this in his sermon just recently.

Psalm 78:37-43 For their heart was not steadfast with Him [God is faithful. That means steadfast. He does not change. Israel was up and down all the time emotionally and with their conduct.], nor were they faithful in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again. How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! Yes, again and again they tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember His power: The day when He redeemed them from the enemy, when He worked His signs in Egypt, and His wonders in the field of Zoan.

God dealt mercifully with them. In other words, He did not demand they do things that were beyond them, because He was *with* them. He remembered that they were flesh. But unfortunately, they did not remember His works. Israel, besides not being steadfast, was plagued by a bad memory. Why did Israel have a bad memory? Well, I could make a broad statement, and I know that it is true, but we will examine it a little bit more thoroughly, and that is, God was not really part of their life.

He was there. He was in the Cloud. He was in the Pillar of fire. He gave them manna every morning. He was their air-conditioning system. He supplied their every need, but there was no real relationship between the individual Israelite and God, except in a few cases. This becomes very important to us because we have to understand that we are not looking at a group salvation.

Do you understand what I mean? Salvation is going to come to each person individually on the basis of God's judgment of their relationship with Him. The Israelites did not even think that far, but we have got to understand that.

Do you understand that faith cannot be imposed, that faith cannot be transferred from one person to another? Everybody marches according to the beat of his own faith, with his own relationship with God. It cannot even be transferred from husband to wife nor from wife to husband. Each person is operating on his own level of faith within his own personal relationship with God.

The Israelites simply did not do this. Besides Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua did have a relationship with God. That is why they made it into the Promised Land when nobody else did. They *did* have a personal relationship with God, and they *did* do what they could to keep that personal relationship burning, and they *lived* by faith.

There is a Scripture that has really become explanatory to me once I understood what God was saying. It is in Psalm 10, verse 4. In one sense this is what separates the believer from the non-believer, and the believer who is growing in faith from those that are not.

Psalm 10:4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God;

The Israelites did not do this. They did not seek God. The next line of this verse is really important.

Psalm 10:4 God is in none of his thoughts.

I do not think we need to think of that word "none" there is that they never thought of God at all. What David is talking about here is that in their personal day-to-day relationship with God, they really did not take Him into consideration at all, or very frequently, unless they were terrified to death about something, and then suddenly they would think of God and ask where He was. Well, He was there all the time.

How many of those people spent time on their knees, talking with God? How many of those people took strolls out in the desert, out into the wilderness, walking and talking with God and meditating on His word, and coming to understanding Him and coming to develop the relationship with Him and grow in the grace and the knowledge of God? They just did not do that, and this is what is going to separate us as well.

Those who do seek God, those who pray to Him, those who allow Him to talk to them through His word, and those who seek to understand how they need to apply the word of God, those are people who will begin to think about God. They will think about His importance and where He is headed with our lives. They will be consulting with God about maybe even the very next step they are going to take, day after day. They are not walking and talking with somebody they do not know, and He knows them. They are always seeking His will, and so they are in tune with Him.

Brethren, this is a part of our life that we must add to the relationship, or there *is* no relationship. This will make the difference as to whether we will have faith or not.

Now back to Deuteronomy, chapter 1, verses 27 and 28.

Deuteronomy 1:27-28 And you complained in your tents, and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the

Amorites, to destroy us. Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, "The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there."

This series of verses in Deuteronomy presents us with a picture of the people of God at their worst: ungrateful, complaining, needless fear, wide-spread panic, blatant faithlessness, and thus instead of responding to God's clear command, they stubbornly disobeyed. They went so far as to say God hated them (verse 27). That is incredible! That is how far they were from God.

These are the same people who witnessed the destruction of Egypt. These are the same people who witnessed the Red Sea being parted. These are the same people who witnessed the manna out there every morning. These are the same people who witnessed water coming out of solid rock—and they said God *hated* them.

How quickly they forgot. They had their minds focused entirely on men—things they could see: the Amorites, or the Anakim, the size of their cities, the size of their walls, the peoples' military prowess. "Fortified up to heaven," they said, but they did not think about God and His powers because God and His powers were not in their mind. There was no relationship with Him. Everything they feared was something they could see.

Now picking up the story in verse 29.

Deuteronomy 1:29-31 "Then I said to you, 'Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.'

Deuteronomy 1:34-36 "And the LORD heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying, 'Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his children I am giving the land on which he walked, because he wholly followed the LORD.'

Drop down now to verse 41.

Deuteronomy 1:41-45 "Then you answered and said to me, 'We have sinned against the LORD; we will go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us.' And when everyone of you had girded on his weapons of war, you were ready to go up into the mountain. "And the LORD said to me, "Tell them, "Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you; lest you be defeated before your enemies.'" So I spoke to you; yet you would not listen, but rebelled against the command of the LORD, and presumptuously went up into the mountain. And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and drove you back from Seir to Hormah. Then you returned and wept before the LORD, but the LORD would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you.

One sin was followed by another, and maybe this last one was the most egregious of all of them that they committed, because what they did then, beginning in verse 41, when God said, "Don't go up into

the land," then they went, and their presumption really came to the fore. They insolently and arrogantly disagreed with God's command and attempted to enter the land, and they were soundly slaughtered.

Is that not a good picture of human nature? God says "Go." They do not. God says, "Don't." They go. Nobody is going to tell *them* what to do.

We can learn from this too, because some of the defiant nature these Israelites exhibited is still within us. The Apostle Paul gives us a picture of this in Romans 7. We will not go into it, but he tells of the struggles he had with what he called "the law of his nature" or "the law within." One of the things we have to do in our life of faith is to strive to keep a cap on it so that it does not break out at an unfortunate time.

What proceeded from here was very interesting, and that was the way God judged this episode. It is in Deuteronomy 2:1.

Deuteronomy 2:1-7 "Then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness of the Way of the Red Sea, as the LORD spoke to me, and we skirted Mount Seir for many days. "And the LORD spoke to me, saying: 'You have skirted this mountain long enough; turn northward. And command the people, saying, "You are about to pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully. Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. You shall buy food from them with money, that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them with money, that you may drink. "For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing.'"

What we are going to see here is just a little bit of how God judged what the Israelites did. The Israelites who were not killed in the assault against the Amorites also paid dearly, because they were driven back into the wilderness and to imprisonment for thirty-eight years. Did you ever think of it that way? They did not participate to the same extent as those who were killed when God said "Don't go," and they went. That group was slaughtered immediately. They received capital punishment. Pfffftttt! And it was over. That was the end of their life.

Those who were above the age of twenty and escaped the slaughter on the border were then put into prison, marching around Mount Seir. At least intermittently they were going around there for thirty-eight years. They were sentenced to what would be the equivalent of manslaughter. They died in the wilderness. It was a death sentence, but it was not quick like those who charged into the land when God said no. But they still got the death penalty, and died in the wilderness. They did not go into the land.

Those who were under the age of twenty did not escape, because, really they were probably of the same mind as those who were openly disobedient to God, but they were too young to do anything. They were under the authority of their parents, even by God's order, but they still suffered. They were confined in the wilderness thirty-eight more years, but were not put to death. They did not die there. You can see a grading of the punishment that came upon those people.

For those under the age of twenty who were not killed, that imprisonment turned out to be a blessing for them, because it was this group that continued to grow, and grow, and grow while they were in the wilderness, and when *they* came to the Promised Land's border again, they had faith that the others did not, and they listened to God's commands when they got there, and they followed them to the tee.

They did exactly what He said in every case. They did not just come up against the Amorites, they came against *five* nations—one right after the other—before they could get into the land. Incidentally, the number 5 is the Bible's number of grace, and God gave them grace in every circumstance as they faced those five nations.

That is a lesson to you and me. When we go up against a problem, a trial, a difficulty that God has arranged for us to go through, if we follow Him, if we have faith in Him, He will *always* give us grace. He never fails to give us grace.

There are a couple of lessons we can learn from this, and maybe the big overall one is that even in this kind of situation where there was outright rebellion against Him, and God was moved to correct, He was merciful in what He did.

Let us go to Psalm 103. We will not get a specific example here, but we will get a generality of His character, especially in this case the character of His judgment.

Psalm 103:6-10 The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.

The correction that was necessary for the rebels is obvious, but it also served to be a positive lesson to their children and to us so that we would not minimize the seriousness of sin, and at the same time come to know God better.

Lesson number one is this: God's mercy is not to be trifled with, because God is also a God of justice. In America, God's mercy is so strongly taught without the corresponding and very necessary teaching regarding our responsibility and obedience that God comes across to this teaching as so distant and tolerant that a false picture of Him is given. That false picture is actually a false god so anxious to serve us that virtually any kind of conduct is acceptable.

That preaching portrays Him as a persistently generous giver, barely interested in how we respond. It is as if there are really no standards. "Yeah, He is a great Creator, but He will just take whatever we deal out." That is not the God of the Bible. His standards are set, and His standards are high, and we do not always live up to them, but they are nonetheless there, and we are being judged by the standards that *He* sets, not the ones we think He will accept. It is important to get that point.

If what the American preachers are teaching is His modus operandi, I can guarantee you that will produce irresponsible adults, because those children, as they are learning, do not have to answer to Him, and therefore they will be unprepared for His kingdom because no standards need be met.

So, the first lesson is, though God corrects, it is always less than we deserve.

The second lesson coordinates perfectly with His mercy, and that is that God is just.

In English usage, the term "just" means fair, impartial, reasonable, and even-handed. But in Hebrew it takes on a little bit stronger sense, because it is translated from exactly the same word normally translated "righteous." Thus the root of these two words—"just" and "righteous"—means "to be stiff, "to be straight." Thus "righteous," in a spiritual or moral context, means "to be correct or right in conformity with God and His law."

Now the word "just" is most often thought of and used in a judicial sense to decide or judge fairly, but still in conformity with what is morally correct. In other words, in actual practice, God's correction is always in measure. It is never too stern nor too generous. His judgment is always even-handed and is just what is needed.

You will find in Deuteronomy 1:31—a verse that we went over before—that God is portrayed as a father, and as such He is holding His children into His bosom, and He is to be honored as the Fifth Commandment says. A father's love does not just feed and clothe, but also includes discipline, which includes punishment. Why does He do it? Because punishment protects a child from far more painful damage from the experiences of life if they could just be avoided.

God's judgment considers every aspect of each situation, and He disciplines impartially and fairly. In this case, at the end of this chapter, those guilty of the most egregious sins of presumptuous arrogance probably are the ones who led the forbidden charge against the Amorites, and died immediately.

A third lesson is not a major point, but something that is said in the following verses is intriguing.

Deuteronomy 2:1-7 "Then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness of the Way of the Red Sea, as the LORD spoke to me, and we skirted Mount Seir for many days. "And the LORD spoke to me, saying: 'You have skirted this mountain long enough; turn northward. And command the people, saying, "You are about to pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully. Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau *as* a possession. You shall buy food from them with money, that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them with money, that you may drink. "For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing. "'

These verses indicate His generosity, even in judging. They look back upon the extra thirty-eight years in the wilderness. After telling the Israelites they were not to meddle with the Edomites, but were to buy food and water from them, we have to ask a question. Where did they get the money to buy the food and water while they were supposedly marching around the desert, marching around Mount Seir? Where did they get the money?

The first thing we would normally think of is that they used the gold and silver or whatever it was they brought out of Egypt. No. They did not. Notice verse 7 again.

Deuteronomy 2:7 "For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand."

To whom is He speaking? Supposedly it is these people who were marching through the wilderness. He blessed them in the work that they did while they were marching around in the wilderness, which leads, I believe, to a logical conclusion that they were not always marching. There were times—maybe long periods of time—when they were doing work.

Do you think that God was going to take a bunch of bums into the Promised Land—a people with welfare mentalities, where God is just feeding them all the time and taking care of them without developing their talents and abilities? God is not that way. He put the children of Israel to work while they were out there.

I do not know what all they did, but I do know that the elder generation was still alive when they went out there, and I am pretty sure that God had those people who were dying out—that generation of those who were above twenty when that episode took place back at the border of the Promised Land—teach their children and their grandchildren the kind of skills and things they did while they were in Egypt, and passing on the ability to build things.

They were not out there in the wilderness simply, totally all by themselves. There were caravans going back and forth between Egypt and the other nations, and you can be sure that they went into business selling the things they produced to the caravans that were going by. God does not produce people who cannot produce wealth. His children will not have welfare mentalities, thinking that they are owed a living. They work, enabling them to give to others. That is an entirely different mentality.

When the children of Israel finally got on the march again and came to the Promised Land the second time around, they had enough money to buy enough food for two and one-half million people; not once, but twice. Three times. They came upon the Edomites, and then Moabites, and then the Ammonites. In each case they had to buy food and water for them and their stock. Apparently they had plenty to enable them to do this so when His children out there went into the land, they were equipped to build a nation, and they did.

You know the story, that when they came upon the Amorites, they did exactly what God said, and they defeated the Amorites in both cases: Og, king of Bashan, and Sihon, king of Heshbon.

Brethren, we are faced with a challenge that exists every day, and the issues in our life really come down to simple terms, and that is, do we believe Him? Do we believe the lessons that are contained for us within His word? We have a clear enough picture to love Him enough to seriously discipline ourselves, to seek Him in our relationship, and submit to what He so kindly tells us to do.

Turn now to the book of Amos to some short, sweet commands that come from Him in a book that is concerned with the time of the end. The book of Amos is about modern Israel.

Amos 5:4 For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: "Seek Me and live,

That is right to the point. Which do we want to do? Die like the Israelites did right on the edge of the Promised Land, or be prepared when we *get* to the Promised Land to meet even the difficult challenges at the end of it?

Amos 5:6 Seek the LORD and live.

Same thing. Drop down now to verses 14 and 15.

Amos 5:14-15 Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to **the remnant of Joseph.**

How about that? The remnant of Joseph is specifically singled out.

Solomon said, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God, [Respect, honor, love God] for this is the whole man."

Now in summary, we have seen in the introduction to Deuteronomy the seriousness of our calling and our responsibility; that it contains the obligation to be faithful to the God who has given us this opportunity and not to waste it, as Israel did earlier through the lack trust and fear of God.

This preamble, which occupies the first three and part way into the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy, tells us this sovereign God is always faithful and fair and generous and merciful in His dealings with us. He is patient, and He supplies all of our needs because He loved Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But we are not an after-thought. He loves us just as much as He loved them, and He wants us to spend eternity with Him and them.