

Deuteronomy (Part 2) (1994)

Fear of God, Grace, and God's Faithfulness

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Today, we are going to continue in Deuteronomy by first briefly reviewing what we covered on Tuesday. I showed then that God says in Deuteronomy 31 in every seventh year Deuteronomy is to be read—reviewed, expounded upon—during the Feast of Tabernacles.

We began by showing Deuteronomy's unique position in the Bible; that it was placed right beside the ark; that it is a summary of wilderness experiences; and a modification of some laws given for use in the land. That is important to this whole series, and to your lives.

Everything we go through is designed so that we will be able to be used by God in the land. We are being trained—prepared—for that time when we are going to be born into the Family of God.

Now, there are dominant themes in the book of Deuteronomy that are more clearly expressed—expounded upon, expanded upon—in greater detail in the New Testament.

The first major point was that it gives us vision for why we do what we do—to prepare us for living in our inheritance. So, in order to do this, God has broken our enslavement to sin, and then set alternatives (choices) before us that we never had before, because we were slaves of sin.

We saw in Deuteronomy 30 that *His way is not difficult*. That is God's own testimony. It is not difficult, but on the other hand, *we find it very difficult*. And the reason we find it difficult is not found in the book of Deuteronomy, but it is given in the New Testament. This is because of our former enslavement we had to sin.

Paul speaks very clearly of that in Romans 7, where he said (now here was a converted man and apostle of Christ, someone surely close to God; surely who had great amounts of God's Holy Spirit, far greater than we do)—that what he willed to do, he did not do, and what he did not want to do, he did. And then he said, “It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me.” Even after many years of experience in the church, growing perhaps as few other men have ever grown in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, he said that sin was still in him.

So, what kind of mountain is it that we have to climb? I will tell you that mountain: It is no greater or no less than the apostle Paul, because God does not give us any trial that is greater for us—to whom much is given, much is required. To whom more is given, they have a higher steeper mountain to climb. And to those who have less in the way of natural ability, less in opportunities for education, their mountain is not quite so high.

So really, when we look at it, everybody for the most part stands equal. Everybody's way is just as hard, just as difficult as everybody else has.

But sin has so estranged us from God that we really have to be alert, for it guides us in its (sin's) way. We have to have factors working for us on our behalf, or we will begin to slide into that slavery. That is so clearly shown in those first five books—how Israel continually wanted to go back to the way they were more comfortable with. It is just as Jesus Christ described it in a couple of places that

when you pour new wine into an old wineskins, you will have difficulty. It is not going to feel so good, saying the old is better, and that is what we are dealing with in terms of sin. And so, those alternative choices always seem so difficult, because sin influences us so frequently that the right way is always [it seems] the hard way. That is what we face.

What do we have working on our behalf? We will look at Deuteronomy 31, and review two verses there:

Deuteronomy 31:12-13 Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess."

Deuteronomy 14:22-23 "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

God commands us to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, and all His other holy days so that we learn to fear Him. Twice we just read that in context where it commands us to review the book of Deuteronomy once every seven years; the feasts are largely for that purpose.

The word "fear," or "fears" appears 28 times in the book of Deuteronomy, and almost every one of them is in the context of learning to fear God, or "Fear Me," or "You shall fear the Lord your God."

From here turn to Psalm 34:

Psalm 34:11 Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

Is that not interesting? We have to be *taught* the fear of the Lord. Kind of sounds like the book of Deuteronomy! We keep the Feast of Tabernacles, and we re-read the book of Deuteronomy so that we learn to fear the Lord our God.

Now this word, "teach" in Psalm 34 more literally means, "chastise"; but its softer forms include "discipline; accustomed to; train; or teach." So, any one of those words can be used in place of "teach," depending upon the context that it appears in—according to the situation. Regardless, the word makes clear—the verse makes clear—that the fear of the Lord is not a quality that we possess by nature; it must be learned.

Now, I turned to this verse because it is exactly the same word in Deuteronomy 31:12-13. The only difference is the approach that is taken. In one place, the teacher says, "I will discipline you, I will train you, or I will teach you." And in the other, the teacher says, "I want you here so you can be trained, taught, disciplined to fear Me."

Perhaps if we could see God—literally just to look up at Him—we would probably be in terror! Just about every appearance of God in any measure of glory in the Bible the person practically flopped over, and became stiff, afraid to move, and afraid to look [such as] the example of Isaiah 6. The Bible does say that no man can look upon the face of God, and live.

So, if we are in that kind of situation, I do not think we would have a long period of time where we would spend learning to fear God. It would be instantaneous. We would know it immediately, hitting the deck before we lose it.

Humanly, we are so oriented that what we cannot see, we have a difficult time respecting.

A simple series of illustrations might be this: People can smoke, do drugs, have horrible diets, be sexually loose; but because they do not see the end result very clearly, they do not spend time in avoiding what in all probability is going to happen to them. So, they bring upon themselves multitudes of problems that they never would have had. If they had just respected what they could not see, but maybe someone told them about, if they had feared it, stood in terror of it, run from it and I mean *run*, too.

Joseph was so afraid of adultery, or fornication with his boss' wife, he ran! That is a good example. The end result was clear in his mind, and so he feared, and got out of there in a hurry, but still ended up in jail, but it was far better than losing his life in the Lake of Fire, or much sooner than that with a noose around his neck, because Potiphar did something.

Godly fear, then, is something that we have to learn—all of us—it does not come naturally. It is something that grows.

We all know that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is also the beginning of knowledge. But, that does not define what the fear of the Lord is. The Bible does define what the fear of the Lord is, and typical of biblical definitions, it defines it by showing an action—what it does. For instance:

I John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.

And so we have a very basic definition of the love of God—it is the keeping of the commandments. That is not all there is, though. But it gives us a very good start and handle on it. Turn to Proverbs 8:

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is to hate evil.

And if a person has the fear of the Lord, that is what they do—they hate evil. Did Joseph fear the Lord? You bet he did. Even though it might have smashed his ego, his sense of masculinity, to do what he did, he hated evil. And, because he feared God, he rushed out of there as fast as he could. He even left his cloak behind.

He did not hem and haw around about it; he was not graceful about it at all. He just got out of there, because he feared God; he hated evil.

Now the way to tell whether a person has the fear of God is to watch what they do. Go back to Deuteronomy 6:

Deuteronomy 6:2 . . . that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments . . .

See the connection? If one has the fear of God, he keeps the statutes and commandments which He commands us.

Deuteronomy 6:2 . . . you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.

So the fear of God expresses itself, reveals itself, by its submission to His way. That is why it is the beginning of wisdom. Wisdom is the practical application of God's Word, commands, and law. And so, if a person begins to apply God's way, His law, and His light, that person is wise! And at the root of that, is the fear of God.

You see? We learn it by studying His Word. This is a major way—by looking at what it is that He wants us to do. And, as we find out what He does and as we set our mind and will to go in that direction, the fear of God begins to grow.

The fear of God precedes chronologically; it comes before. But it works *with* faith—they are not exactly the same thing. It works with faith, it works with hope, and it works with love. It is fundamental to their operation in our life.

And I think that we can confidently say that it *leads to them*. As a matter of fact, the fear of God at the beginning of a person's conversion is more important than faith, hope, and love. But as one grows, it begins to become secondary to the others, but it is always—always!—present as part of a converted person's personality. And it has to be, because it never lets us relax and let down our guard. The fear of God always tends to nudge us toward wisdom—doing the right thing.

So, wisdom is the right, practical application of God's way. It is wise to obey God, is it not? It certainly is. It may not look like it right at the moment, but in the long run, it is going to be wise.

Turn to Numbers 14. Here we find Moses saying,

Numbers 14:9 Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread [we are going to eat them up like a piece of cake]; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them."

I introduced this verse because it is obvious that the fear that appears in verse 9 appears to be different from the fear of the Lord. But it is not. It is an element of the fear of the Lord. Here, the fear of the Lord has to be with being afraid of, in the sense of being in terror of. Let me tell you right now, it is exactly the same word as used in Deuteronomy about fearing God. But, here, the application leads to another aspect of fear, and that is one of terror, literally being afraid because we want to save our skin.

So what this does is broaden our understanding of the fear of God. The fear of God is not only a deep and reverential awe—a wonder of His magnificence, and His power—it is also tinged with being afraid of Him.

I will tell you something about myself, in respect to being afraid of a parent.

My dad was the one in the family who was really affectionate. He hardly ever raised his voice at us, but my mother was a different story altogether. And I do not know why it was that way in my family, but he hardly ever spanked me.

I almost burned down the house, once, and he did spank me then. I built a bonfire in the basement! I just thought it was a good way to get rid of papers and old wood that was lying around there, so I built a bonfire. I was probably about 6 or 7 years old, and I remember I got tanned pretty well.

But my mother, she probably gave 15 to 20 spankings for every one that dad gave me. I got a lot of spankings from her. It got to the place in my family where I and my brother both feared her so much, that all she had to do was raise her hand, and we ducked! I mean, we dove for the ground. She may not have meant anything about it at all, maybe she was just going to scratch an itch, but we hit the deck! If we were anywhere around her, we were pretty sure that there was going to be a slap, or swing, or something coming, and we were getting ready to move. That is the fear of the Momma! I am glad she is not here. She would be terribly embarrassed.

At any rate, the fear of God is tinged with this feeling as well. And there is good reason for that. I know that God in a way does not want that, but He wants that reverential awe that submits to Him out of sheer pleasure and love and joy and delight of doing so! But, whatever it takes, brethren, we have got to learn the fear of God.

One way or the other, whether He has to scare us straight out of our pants, whatever it takes, to get us to learn the fear of Him, He is going to use, because He loves us and wants us in His Kingdom. And since we do not have this by nature, and since it is so important in being a foundation for other things—faith, hope, and love—it is necessary to use whatever means at His disposal to get us to begin to move in that direction.

So to summarize up to this point, the reason God wants us to review His law every seventh year at the Feast of Tabernacles, and why He wants us to set aside the second tithe to keep this Feast of Tabernacles, is so that we will quit sinning, and depart from evil; so that we will learn the fear of the Lord. Positively speaking, it is so that we will do good, and learn to do more good!

One of the major differences between Christ and the Pharisees was their approach to righteousness. The fundamental approach the Pharisees had toward righteousness was to avoid evil. Jesus' approach to righteousness was to do good. There is a world of difference between the two. Brethren, *if you are doing good, you cannot be doing evil*. Which is better to do? Just avoid evil, or to do good, and do it all the time? It is so simple. It is not complicated at all.

And if you concentrate on the doing good, because you fear God, the negative aspects never even come to mind. Our mind is constantly oriented in the right direction. It is positive in the direction toward being like God is. So, that is why you are here.

You are here to do good, obeying God. You are here to learn to do more good. So, let us forget about the negative one. It is better to do that.

The next aspect is important: How is it that we are even in a position to do this? How is it that the Israelites were even in a position to be given the book of Deuteronomy? How is it that we are in the position to have this vision of preparing for the Kingdom of God? Or preparing to use our inheritance? Learning to fear God?

Turn back to Deuteronomy again. These verses are jam packed!! Many, many New Testament contexts are derived from this series of verses. I cannot stress that enough! Many, many! So, we really want to pay attention to this series of verses; they are very important to New Testament doctrines.

Deuteronomy 7:6-11 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them."

The first major New Testament subject that is in here is titled with a word that does not appear in the context—grace. This is a very broad subject. In fact, I believe it was Martin Luther King who is credited with saying that, "All is of grace." His reason for saying that is partly a justification for not overcoming a couple of serious character flaws he had. He admitted to a very violent temper. He got angry very easily. And so, he might lose his temper, and then he would remark, "It's a good thing everything is by grace," because he knew he was not overcoming this.

Let us turn back to the New Testament in I Corinthians 4. What Martin Luther King said was very close to the truth.

I Corinthians 4:5-6 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.

Consider this in relation to Deuteronomy 7, "I did not choose you because you were great, you were the least." Consider how the book of I Corinthians begins, "You see your calling, brethren, how that not many mighty, not many noble," not many wise are called. But instead, God has called the weak of the world to confound the mighty. Nobody is going to glory before God, because we are all going to be brought to the place where we recognize that all is of grace. Not quite, but it comes awfully close. Let us continue:

I Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? [As if it was something inherent.]

Now as we just saw in a previous sermon, we do have a part in this. God has set choices before us, and though our part is small, we still must make the choices. Though God's grace is overwhelmingly more important, we cannot relegate our part to total insignificance.

Let us catch the essence of this grace. In Titus 2, we find:

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

That is how broad this subject of grace is. It involves the total scope of salvation. Now if we want to look at this we could go all the way back to when God was thinking these things through, and then the act of creation itself, none of these things had to be carried through; the very fact that He thought it all out; the very fact that He then entered into the work of creating; the very fact that He made Adam and Eve; the very fact that He breathed into them the breath of life, the very fact that He put them in the Garden; the very fact that He made all of the trees, and everything else that comes out of the ground; the very fact that He made animals; the fact that He made the weather and rain, and on and on it goes. God's grace as exemplified by His providence for His creation; *all* life depends upon God giving it and sustaining it.

You see, that is just a physical type, and example of where grace fits in. We usually, normally, think of it in terms of the spiritual things and salvation, and being born into His Family, and how that is an act of grace on His part, but everything from the beginning to the end is by His institution, His creation—He sustains it, He provides for it, everything. What do you have that has not been given?

And so, “All is of grace,” comes very close to saying the whole thing.

Now, the salvation aspect has appeared very strongly to you and me, not so strongly to the world, but it is available; it is there, and the world has been witness to it to some degree, and that is why Paul writes that it has appeared to all men. It does not mean that it necessarily appeared to every last person, but in a general way, it has appeared, and it will appear as the judgments are concluded.

In Ephesians 1 you will find:

Ephesians 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ [that is God's grace], just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

And so not only has grace unto salvation appeared to all men in a general way, to you and me, it has appeared in a very specific clear way, because God has predestinated that there will be people in the image of His Son, and Himself too. And so, He predestinated that there would be a church that would be peopled, and that these people would have certain characteristics within them. That is a part of His grace.

Ephesians 1:9-10 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ [one body, the church], both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

In just reading this aloud, I think we ought to expand that. In limiting it only to the church, the application of that is wrong. The “one” there should be in the Kingdom of God. “He is going to gather together in one—kingdom, family—all things in Christ.”

Ephesians 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

Now we can add to this that very familiar scripture in John 6. This verse is important because so far, we have been speaking in more or less general terms. That salvation has appeared to all men—that is very general. Ephesians 1 makes it more specific in that we are brought together in one body. And now we find,

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

And so, you were handpicked! I was handpicked. The grace of God has appeared specifically to you. It is really getting narrow, is it not?

Remember this is all really an expansion of Deuteronomy 7, beginning in verse 6. He is setting the principle there by which He is going to operate. And this disparate group of people is eventually going to grow into a great family that is going to be a kingdom.

Romans 3:24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

He not only called us, but He also, by His grace, justifies us, and redeems us.

Romans 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

Why is not everybody on earth called into God's Family at this time? That is really the question behind this. Is there any unrighteousness with God? Certainly not.

Romans 9:15-16 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

You are here because of an act of grace and mercy on His part.

Romans 11:5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

This is a very small number of people that God has called and chosen and elected to be a part of His work at His time.

Paul gives a personal testimony of his experience:

Galatians 1:15-16 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood.

It is very clear that each and every person is God's choice! That is awesome! We are not talking generalities here. We are talking specifics. We can add to this the fact that the giving of the Holy Spirit is a gift. I Corinthians 12 makes it very clear that the gifts that God gives us to work within the church—within His group—are given by Him so that we can function as a human body functions—as a team; each person being equipped even as the heart is equipped to do its job, the brain is equipped to do its job, all the tendons, and ligaments and muscles, and all the bones, are equipped to do their job. The hand cannot do the job of the nose, and the job of the nose cannot do the job of the ear, and the ear cannot do the job of the eyes, none of them can do the job of the heart, everybody is fit together into the body of Christ according to God's choice.

And just so that we can do the job, He then gives us the gifts to be able to do it.

Now, they might be given in a raw form, or they might be given in a powerful form to work with something that is untrained, or even unknown. And it may take us a while to figure out what it is that we are gifted for, in order to find out where we fit.

We could branch off into government here because once we begin to find out, it then becomes our responsibility to fill that position with all our might, and not wish that we were doing something else, because it is highly likely that if we tried to do what God has designed somebody else to do, we would find ourselves really flopping around and not growing at all.

In Romans 6:23, He makes it very clear that eternal life is a gift. And then finally, let us turn to Ephesians 2 to close the loop.

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

Now this Bible translates it in the past tense. I should have looked this up, but I am sure that it is written in a past-perfect tense. And if I understand the grammar correctly, that means it was something that was begun in the past and is continuing in the present. And so, it has no sense of ending; it just began in the indefinite past, and is continuing on into the indefinite future. And so some people when they translate that, they will say, “By grace you are being saved.”

Ephesians 2:6-8 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

So, that is very clear.

Now all of this in turn leads to a more specific area of understanding that is again introduced in the book of Deuteronomy. And so let us go back to Deuteronomy 7. This is a second aspect of why we are in a position to do this—to learn to fear God.

Deuteronomy 7:9 "Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments."

The Faithful God: God is faithful! Here is a major theme: God's faithfulness.

I do not know whether you are aware of this, but the major theme of the Feast of Tabernacles in the Old Testament is not the world tomorrow. But rather, it is God's faithfulness.

It was formed around a harvest. And that harvest symbolizes to us the spiritual harvest that is going to come in the Millennium. And so we see that God is faithful to His promise, that all flesh should be saved, and given that opportunity.

But, in the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant, He did not stress those things. Instead, He stressed His faithfulness in regard to bringing forth harvests out of the ground, as well as the spiritual connotation that the reason they were even in the land is because God was faithful to get them out of Egypt, and to supply all their needs while they were on their pilgrimage to the Promised Land.

Leviticus 23:41-43 You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."

Now, where is it obvious in the Exodus story that Israel was not going to go directly into the Promised Land? It was within a week or so after they came out. He did not take them the way of the Philistines, but suddenly, they made a jerk to the right when the Cloud went in that direction, because "lest they see war, and become afraid."

So, right at the beginning, God had in mind that He was not going to take them directly there. You and I would want to go straight there. And so did they.

God had something else in mind. He had a pilgrimage in mind. I do not know whether He had the whole 40 years in mind, but it is very likely that He knew what they were going to do. And that there would be a fit reason for them not to go into the land after the second year, but if they were so good, so yielding to Him, so soft-hearted in everything, He could still take them into the land. If that occurred at the end of the second year, they would have been prepared. But they did not.

So, what does the booth represent—what does it become a symbol of? It is a symbol of a temporary dwelling place; a symbol of somebody living in this only because there was no permanent place for which to put down roots, and rear one's family, and farm one's land, and reap the crops, doing all those things that are normally considered necessary for communal life for the forming of a nation.

Did a nation ever exist in which everybody in the nation was on the move? How can you live in such a circumstance? You cannot. It is impossible.

Here is just one clear example: eating. Food comes out of the ground. If you are on the move, and you plant your crops in Philadelphia, but you then keep on moving, by the time the crops are ready to be harvested, and you are in Pittsburgh, you are in trouble!

They had no way to do it. Some say that they could eat their flocks and herds. Yeah? What if there was very little grass for them to eat in the first place because they were not in a lush place where it was raining every other day, easily growing grass. Besides that, there were probably about 2.5 million of them. And it would not have been very long before all that pasture was gone.

And then, how long is the gestation period for lambs, goats, calves, or whatever else they might eat? They would have run out of food posthaste.

And then, what about water?

So you see, for the ordinary things of life, you have to be settled! But they were not, yet.

So, in the Old Testament the Feast of Tabernacles is a memorial of God's faithfulness in supplying all their needs. Despite 40 years on the move, they had all the food they needed, the water they needed. God worked miracles, but those are not the only things. He did multitudes of things in protecting them, providing for them, even making sure that their comfort level was such, that the cloud was overhead most of the day in the hot sun, unless, once in a while, they needed an attitude adjustment. He maybe would open the cloud, and the heat would come, and they would get burned, and they would cry out to Him to put the cloud back over them. "Oh yeah, the Cloud is up there. We need Him."

Now, never let yourself forget this lesson, because the New Testament considers us as pilgrims too, does it not? Pilgrims, strangers, foreigners. And even though we are not on the move as literally as the Israelites were, God keeps our lives upset to a certain extent so that we will understand that we are on a pilgrimage. This is not home. It may be home, but it is not home home. We are going to our home home.

And so, He manipulates us into positions where we have to exercise our dependence upon Him in such things as tithing—wow, it is tough to tithe—one tithe, two tithes, three tithes, with taxes continually rising. So, we feel the need, do we not? Sure we do.

So there are circumstances that He manipulates us into, so that we can feel the need of crying out to Him. Knowing that we are only going to survive because of His faithfulness, we will get to the Promised Land, only because God has supplied our need.

Now, we are going to expand on this.

Joshua 23:14 "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed.

Is God faithful? The Faithful God!

I do not know whether you understand the importance of this—salvation is by grace through faith. You cannot trust a God who is not faithful. Your salvation hinges, not on your faith, but on whether God is faithful.

And so, He uses the Old Testament experience of Israel to picture to us how faithful He is. And, how even when the people are in a terrible circumstance, 2.5 to 3 million people on the move, for 40 years, in a wilderness (which simply means a place where people do not live). I am sure that the topography there, varied from place to place, where they occasionally came upon grassland, but this was not the kind of place where people would normally choose to live, because it would not sustain life. That is why there were no people living there.

It does not mean, necessarily, that it was a hot howling desert like the Sahara, even though there may have been portions of it that were like the Sahara. It does not mean that every portion of it was like that. They spent the majority of the years in the wilderness at Petra. If it was anything at all like it is today, it was a rocky place where very little would grow. So, they may have had caves to live in, but there were apparently no springs of water running there. But, God supplied their need; took care of them; provided for them.

Now that whole thing is in there so that you will learn that on your journey into the Kingdom of God, He will be just as faithful to you, as He was to them. He will not let you down.

That is why in relation to the Feast of Tabernacles in the Old Testament, the emphasis extols God's faithfulness, and uses the booth as its symbol—its illustration. Despite their terrible condition, He was able to take care of them.

I Samuel 12:22 For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people.

Let us read that again: “For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake.” He has to defend it! He has to live up to it. What happens to His reputation if He does not do what He says He is going to do? Can you trust somebody who does not do what they say they are going to do? You cannot!

And so, He says, then, “It has pleased the Lord to make you His people.” This, then, describes what God's faithfulness does.

II Samuel 7:28-29 "And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant. Now therefore, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue before You forever; for You, O Lord GOD, have spoken it, and with Your blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever.

So, a faithful person says the truth, and carries out what he says he will do. And, in this case, David is the one giving the prayer, and he bases his confidence, expressed there in the prayer, in the fact that God says the truth, and carries out what He says.

The word faithful in the Hebrew has a word-picture to it. It is like the word righteousness. Righteousness has this picture of a person holding a scale, and it is in perfect balance. Faithful has the picture of something—wall, pillar, post—that can be leaned upon. And if you lean on it, it does not fall over, and you do not get hurt. It also has the picture of something that is solid underlying something else, but what is on top of it is being held erect, or held up, by what it is on. So when the picture is verbalized, it comes to mean something that is trustworthy, solid, rigidly observant to its obligations, and duties.

Now, when applied to God, then, being faithful means that He will take care of what He has made—His creation; physical or spiritual—He will take care of it. It also means that He cannot begin something without finishing it.

Wow, if I ask for a raise of hands, how many of you have begun something that you did not finish? Every hand in the room ought to go up.

You see, God thinks things through. And, if He gives His approval to something that He is going to do, it will be done. And, if He feels that He cannot finish it, He does not start it. It is that simple. So, what He begins He finishes.

So then, do you now understand Philippians 1:6, “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”? Sure!

God is not like you and me! We get something partway done, and then we grow frustrated with it, or tired of it, and we quit. But, when God says something, He is utterly obligated to uphold the reputation of His name. When He gives His word to do something, there is an absolute binding and known line of action that He will take. We may not know every nuance of that, but we do know the end. Because He says that He will do it.

And so, the whole Bible largely consists of showing God carrying out obligations that He has set Himself to do. And, He has done this in order that we will come to understand to trust His Word. God is faithful, because that is His nature. With Him there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. There is no change because of unseen circumstances; there is no failure; His power is never exhausted; and His faithfulness is the basis of our faith in Him.

Turn back to Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.

Do you understand that this is the major problem in the world? Just before we left home (Charlotte, N.C.) one of the items in the news was a poll that had recently been taken of Americans, asking them whether they believed in God. Ninety-five percent of the persons polled responded affirmatively. They believe in God.

What is the trouble? They do not *believe Him*. They believe He exists, but they do not believe Him. It is that simple, is it not? They believe He exists, but they do not believe what He says.

This is our challenge! Do we believe what He says?

I have gone through this whole thing to show you that you are hand-picked to show forth the praises of Him who has called you.

And the way we do this is to believe Him.

Do you understand why He says in Deuteronomy 30, "It is not hard"? It is not inaccessible! It is simple! These things are so simple! They are profound in their ramifications! But, the principles themselves are so simple that our faith in Him is based on His faithfulness.

So He spends the whole book giving us illustrations of how faithful He is, so that we can have faith. And if we have faith, and it is underlain with the fear of God, the chances are so great that we are going to make the right choice; it is almost a foregone conclusion that we will.