

Ancient Israel, God's Training Tool

Last Day of Unleavened Bread

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When we think of this time of year, we tend to focus on Ancient Israel and their exit out of Egypt. This is understandably so, because that was when the Old Testament Passover was instituted, during the plagues that God brought upon Egypt. He also gave them instructions on keeping Unleavened Bread as they were exiting Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. The Bible tells us that Egypt was a picture of sin, and their exit from there is similar to how we look at leaven and putting it out of our lives. It's a picture of getting sin out of our lives.

Much like Ancient Israel's journey, ours is similar. What I mean is there was a one-time event where they exited Egypt, but it wasn't like their arrival to the Promised Land immediately happened. It resulted in a multiple decade journey from the time they left Egypt to the time that they made it into the Promised Land.

Our journey is similar, because our de-leavening process starts when we are baptized. We repent of our sins and receive God's holy spirit. But that is just the beginning of the process. It's not like just because we go through that, that suddenly we're de-leavened and the process is done. It's a long journey and we start off from that point forward on our way to our Promised Land which is the Kingdom of God. So our journey lasts from the time that we start our conversion process to either the end of our lives or until Christ returns, whichever comes first.

What I would like to do today is focus on this analogy of looking at Ancient Israel and the lessons we can learn from their journey. As I mentioned, it wasn't just a one-time event, it was a multiple decade journey and ours is very similar.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 10. We're going to look at a section of scripture that tells us that the things they went through were examples for us in our Christian walk. We'll also see a section of scripture that refers to a number of specific stories of what they went through and we will look at these in detail.

1 Corinthians 10:1. Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2) all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3) all ate the same spiritual food, 4) and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. (NKJV)

One of the doctrines of the Church of God that is taught is that Jesus Christ is the God of the Old Testament. When we look back and read the Old Testament stories, we see God interacting with Ancient Israel or specific individuals. The individual being referred

to is Jesus Christ. He is the God of the Old Testament. To prove that doctrine, all you have to do is read the first four verses that we just read. It states that Jesus Christ was the Rock they were following. That is the God they were interacting with.

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

6) Now these things became our examples ... (NKJV)

We're going to come back and focus on this concept of an example in a moment.

6b) ... to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.

7) 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."

8) Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell;

9) nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;

10) nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

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. (NKJV)

We're going to come back to this verse in a moment.

12) Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

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. (NKJV)

I've been in the Church of God all of my life. I have to admit for the majority of my life I read verse 11 and the meaning went over my head.

Verse 11 says, "*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.*"

For most of my life, I would read over that scripture and all I got from it was that all these things were written down as examples for us, which they were. The Old Testament had a story of all the things that Ancient Israel and specific individuals went through. I looked at it as if it was about these things being written down. That's not totally what it says. It says these things happened for that reason and they were written for that purpose. What that is saying is the reason God orchestrated all this in the first place was as a teaching tool for us.

Think about it. Why did God create mankind? Why do we have a planet earth and the human race and all this to begin with? The purpose is for God to reproduce and create

more God beings. He is expanding the God family. That is the ultimate purpose, because the objective is to expand the Kingdom of God and the family of God with more God beings. That's what this is all about. That's why human beings exist.

If that is the purpose and is accomplished through the conversion process, through Christ's sacrifice, receiving His holy spirit, developing Godly character and being born into His family, that being the reason why we exist in the first place, why wait four thousand years to send Jesus Christ to be the sacrifice and die for us, to enable the conversion process to really get started? Why not do that on the front end? Why wait four thousand years to get that kicked off? Well, think about it. He said that all these things happened for that reason, so they could be a training tool for us for whom the end of the ages have come. This is how much planning, effort and detail God put into making sure that we would have the best possible opportunity to make it.

We look to these examples, for instruction, encouragement, for admonition to make it. We have these people we can relate to and their stories and can learn from those examples. He wanted to make sure that all of this was available to give us every opportunity to make it. That's how much effort and planning He put into all of this.

Again, why make a physical covenant with a physical nation of people for several thousand years when you're just going to have to resurrect them, open their eyes and then give them the chance to accomplish why they were created in the first place, which is the opportunity to be converted and be born into God's family? Why go through this exercise? This was done as a teaching tool for us. These things happened and they were written down for us for whom the end of the ages have come. In other words, this was a big training exercise that God did for our benefit.

If you'd like a title for this sermon, it's:

Ancient Israel, God's Training Tool

That's why all of this was orchestrated, for us to learn so we would have the best possible opportunity to make it into God's kingdom.

With that in mind, we will go back through these scriptures. The things we just read are referring to a number of specific examples that played out in Ancient Israel's journey between when they left Egypt and when they made it into the Promised Land. There are lots of mistakes that they fell into and things we can learn from.

Let's turn to verse 5 in 1 Corinthians 10.

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

There was an ugly attrition rate to put it in modern terminology. When you look at all those who started this journey out of Egypt, to those who successfully made it to the

Promised Land, the vast majority of them did not make it because of the various sins they committed along the way. One of the lessons we can learn from this is we can be attrition as well if we don't learn from these examples. These are examples to help us to make it to our Promised Land which isn't Canaan, it's the Kingdom of God.

6) Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. (NKJV)

Again we have these as examples for us. What is specifically referred to here is a story we find in Numbers 11. This is referring to an example of lust. Oftentimes when we think of the term "lust" what tends to come to our minds in this world would be lust in a sexual context. This can certainly apply to other things. It could be your neighbor's house, your neighbor's job, their car, their income. Whatever it is, we can set our sights and lust after something that is not rightfully ours and this creates the same problem.

Numbers 11:1. *Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.*

2) Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched.

3) So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the LORD had burned among them.

4) Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving ... (NKJV)

I'm going to stop here for a second. If you have a New King James, you'll notice next to the word "yielded", in the margin there is a little number 1 and it says, *lusted intensely*. When they yielded to intense craving, it says that the people lusted intensely. What they were lusting after wasn't anything sexual; it was food that they were lusting after.

4b) ... so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat?"

5) We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic;

6) but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!" (NKJV)

Notice a couple of things, and this is not untypical of when someone is lusting or coveting something. You wind up taking the thing that you are lusting for and glamorizing and glorifying it. It becomes the most fantastic thing in the world and they're just going to die if they don't have it.

They go into great detail of, "Oh, the leeks and the cucumbers and the onions!"

They forgot all about the slavery and oppression that went with that food. Think about where they were.

Yes, they had this food to eat and they were crying out, “Please get us out from under these task masters and this horrible oppression.”

That was part of the package deal that they received. What tends to happen when we focus and lust after something, it becomes glorified and glamorized in our minds that this is the most wonderful thing in the world. The other thing that tends to happen is we tend to devalue what we have.

The Israelites said, “All we have is this manna. If we just had the good food that we had in Egypt.”

Turn to Numbers 21. I'll show you a comment they made about manna. It will make this point of how we tend to devalue things we have when we lust after things we don't have.

Numbers 21:5. *And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? ... (NKJV)*

Notice how dire their view of everything is. “You just brought us here to kill us and we're all going to die.” Notice the next sentence.

5b) ... For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.” (NKJV)

This is a miracle that God is feeding them with on a daily basis. It essentially falls from the sky six days a week. On Friday He gave them twice as much and didn't do it on the Sabbath to make it clear that they understood when the Sabbath was. This was a miracle that happened regularly to feed them.

One of their complaints was, “We don't have anything to eat!”

That's not true, because they were being fed every day. They just don't like what they're receiving. “If we just had the food that we had in Egypt.”

Of course, this came with slavery and bondage. They glorified what they had in Egypt and called manna “worthless bread.”

Part of my point is that lust tends to destroy mental health. When we lust for something, we think our life would be wonderful. We tend to destroy our mental health for where we are at now. Think of it like this: Happiness can be explained in a mathematical formula. Happiness equals reality minus expectations. If our expectations are beyond our reality, we're always going to be in a happiness deficit. Basically it's a mathematical formula. If those expectations are beyond what we can obtain, then our reality will never measure up to that, and we'll always be unhappy. If our expectations are lower than our reality, and we don't think that we deserve or are entitled to everything then life

is great. We're happy. Our happiness turns out good if the mathematical formula works that way.

Numbers 11:8. *The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil.*

9) *And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.*

10) *Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. (NKJV)*

We're going to skip over some of the rest of this. Notice that their lust and unhappiness didn't just make them unhappy. It wore Moses out and God was angry. Everybody was miserable.

Moses basically goes to God and said, "Why did you burden me with these griping, horrible people? I've had it! Just kill me."

It ruined everyone's mental health. To see how the story ends, let's skip over to verse 31. God basically answers their prayer because they're saying, "If we only had some food." God gives them what they asked for.

It reminds me of something my mother would say when I was little. She said, "Son, be careful what you ask for because you might get it."

That's basically what happens here.

31) *Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground.*

32) *And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. (NKJV)*

Now stop here for a second. Notice what they're doing. These people are not starving. They're getting manna six days a week and their nutritional needs are met. They are lusting after this extra food. They are actually staying up around the clock trying to get as much quail as they can get their hands on. They're kind of going crazy going after the quail. You can see the lust and the coveting that consumes them. Notice how God responds to this. God allowed all of those who were consumed with lust to identify themselves through their actions. Then He sends a curse after them.

33) *But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague.*

34) So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving. (NKJV)

God had enough of the people who were consumed with lust and He wiped them out. He put them out of their misery in a sense. One of the points I'm getting at is that lust can destroy mental health. We live in a society that is very materialistic and has an entitlement mentality.

Often you hear, "I'm entitled to this. I deserve this."

One of the common sales pitches of the feminist movement is, "You can have it all. You can have everything."

Well, if your expectations are set to that, you're pretty much guaranteed to be unhappy because your expectations will always exceed your reality. You'll always be in a happiness deficit. If your expectations are about having it all, reality is never going to live up to those expectations. That's not a deal that anybody gets, regardless of who you are. Let's turn now to 1 Corinthians 10 and pick up on our next example. As I mentioned, we're going to come in and out of this chapter today.

***1 Corinthians 10:7.** 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." (NKJV)*

This particular verse is referring to the golden calf incident in Exodus 32. That last sentence is basically a word-for-word quote. Turn to Exodus 32. We'll see what we can learn from this example.

***Exodus 32:1.** Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (NKJV)*

We're going to come back to this concept later, but notice how this starts off. It is the absence of physical leadership that causes the people to start wandering in this direction. I'm not saying that Moses was doing anything wrong. Moses and Joshua were up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments from God, just as God wanted. But Moses and Joshua were gone longer than the people expected.

They said, "We don't know what happened to them. We don't know if he is coming back."

Notice how this affects their actions.

2) And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

3) *So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron.*

4) *And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (NKJV)*

They are basically replacing God with this golden idol.

5) *So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD."*

6) *Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. (NKJV)*

Remember I said it was a word-for-word quote? This is where it's quoting from. This is how we know that this is an exact reference to this example.

7) *And the LORD said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.*

8) *They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'"*

9) *And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people!*

10) *Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." (NKJV)*

Essentially God is saying, "Moses, step aside. I want to get them all with one shot. I've had enough of this. I want to wipe these people out."

We are going to skip over the rest of the story, but Moses steps in and negotiates with God. He said, "Please don't kill them all."

Let's focus on what went wrong here. What resulted in the people completely going astray? Realize this is a bunch of carnal people who didn't have God's holy spirit to lead them. We need to realize that these are examples and we can fall into similar pitfalls in our lives if we don't learn from this..

Basically two major things happened here: (1) the absence of leadership. Moses and Joshua were on the mountain. Who knows exactly how long they were gone, but obviously the people thought that they were gone longer than they had expected. They said, "We don't know what happened to those guys. Let's go on without them." (2) The failure of leadership. Aaron was the one left in charge, and see what happens when the people come to him and say, "Hey, let's make a golden calf." He says, "Great idea! Bring me all your gold. Let's make a golden calf and have a feast."

He appeases them and completely goes along with it. So what happens? We have the people falling into idolatry.

What can we learn from this? If we look at the last twenty-plus years in the Church of God, I think we can find some parallels. If you look at what we have experienced in the last couple of decades, the failure of leadership is one of the major things that we have experienced. Think about it. Twenty-plus years ago the vast majority of the Church of God was all one big organization. Today we have hundreds. How did that transition take place? It started with the leadership of the original organization apostatizing and giving up truth. It was a failure of leadership. It wasn't just a matter of a handful of leaders going off in the weeds. What else happened? Thousands of brethren followed them and went in that direction. It's easy for people to get comfortable in their physical settings and go along with the crowd and follow the leader. They're not necessarily working out their own salvation and thinking about their responsibility and commitments.

What winds up happening is that they say, "It's okay for me not to keep the Feast anymore."

People immediately take the easy route. They're following the leader.

We have to remember that we didn't make a covenant with any physical organization or leader. We made a covenant with God. That's what happened in this case. God hadn't gone anywhere. People wanted to know what happened to Moses. Regardless of where Moses is, the deal wasn't with Moses. The deal was with God. God hadn't gone anywhere. The people go astray because, to quote a saying, "The cat's away so the mice will play." It's the same concept. Well, Moses isn't around so we can do anything we want to now. God is the one they made the deal with.

The concept I'm getting at is what Paul covered in Philippians 2:12. He is addressing the same kind of concept here.

Philippians 2:12. *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;*

13) for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.
(NKJV)

So Paul is referring to the same thing. He's saying that even if he is not present, you've got to work out your own salvation because you didn't make a deal with me. You made a deal with God, and your salvation depends on that. Looking at this concept, if you project forward to the future on a physical basis for the Church of God, this concept becomes extremely relevant. If you look at the demographics of the Church of God today, especially at the ministry or leadership, what you'll find is a very heavily weighted demographic of those towards retirement age. Now project that forward of what that means for our future. We have no idea how long it will be before Christ returns. I certainly wouldn't set any dates on that. That has repeatedly failed for centuries.

People say it's going to happen on a certain date and we're always wrong. So we have to look at this and consider, what if Christ doesn't for another ten, twenty or plus years? That's a possibility. We don't know. When you look at the demographics, you can see a clear picture of what we're going to deal with going forward. To illustrate this point, I'd like to read a quote I found on the internet this morning. It's reported from the largest Church of God organization in existence today. It's speaking specifically in regards to demographics of leadership. This is a word-for-word quote that they published:

Our U.S. pastoral demographic presently includes twenty-three pastors, full-time, part-time and volunteer out in the field who are seventy years old or older, even more when home office assigned men are counted. Then we have twenty-six pastors between the ages of sixty-two and sixty-nine. When a pastor reaches age sixty-two, we begin to discuss active retirement planning. That process is presently underway for forty-nine of our eighty-one pastors. That is sixty percent.

This is not unique to one organization. This is true across the Church of God in general, if you just look at leadership. I was recently talking to a pastor that works for the second largest organization and he quoted a similar type of thing. He was projecting it forward about four years into the future when this figure would be true. He said they, at that point, would have nineteen of their pastors at age seventy or above. Now project that forward ten years. If you're seventy or above now, that means ten years from now they are eighty or above. Think of what that is going to mean as you go forward. Through the aging process, death, health issues and retirement issues, you will wind up with dramatically less in terms of leadership than what we've been used to. If you go back twenty plus years ago, most individuals were familiar with larger congregations. They had elders and deacons. There was a whole social structure that was considered the norm. Over the last couple decades, that has become less and less the case. There are still many congregations today who have live services every Sabbath since the days of Worldwide. You can see just by demographics alone, if things go on another couple of decades, that's going to become less and less common.

Certainly most organizations are trying to train, ordain and teach younger men, but when you have sixty percent or more of your leadership in that age group, there's not going to be enough coming behind them to keep up with that rate.

I'm not trying to create a gloom and doom picture for the Church of God going forward. God is in control and He chooses to allow things as He wants. He doesn't lead us through anything that He cannot deliver us through. The point is that sometimes we get into a mentality of as long as we have this social support we can follow the leader and have all this around us and we don't have to put so much stress on ourselves. We can just do whatever everybody else is doing. That concept is going to largely go away. Realistically, it's going to become more common where one individual is trying to pastor large areas of diverse scattered individuals. That will become more of the norm. I'm not saying there will be a complete desertion of leadership, I'm just saying to look at the demographics and realize that there are challenging times ahead.

The point is to remember what Paul said, “You’ve obeyed in my presence, how much more now in my absence?”

He said that we didn’t make a deal with any individual. You didn’t make a deal with any organization. You made a covenant with God. Following through on that commitment is what is important. Our salvation depends on that, regardless whether or not you have a pastor there every Sabbath. That doesn’t change the deal or the rewards or the potential loss if you don’t follow through on it.

Let’s turn to 1 Corinthians 10:8.

1 Corinthians 10:8. *Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; (NKJV)*

This is referring to a story we find in Numbers 25. Before we turn to that, I want to give you some background information that is not necessarily covered in that chapter so you understand the full context of what is being addressed. The story comes about because of an individual named Balak. He is king of Moab and he is observing what’s going on in his nation. He sees something troubling. He sees the nation of Israel starting to move into his neighborhood and taking over the area and he gets nervous.

He thinks, “What happens if these people want to conquer me and take over my nation? I don’t like this scenario. What can I do to prevent this?”

That’s basically his thought process. He reaches out to an individual named Balaam and he tries to seek his counsel and his help to prevent this from happening to his nation. There is a complicated process that plays out between these two, and we won’t cover all the details. The bottom line is that Balaam gives Balak some counsel. He said, “Here’s what you want to do. You have to separate these people from God because God is the force behind them that is making them powerful and successful. Here’s what you do. You take the best looking women from Moab and they seduce the men of Israel and get them into relationships and sexual immorality with them. This can be utilized to take them away from the God of Israel. To prove some of the background of this, turn to Revelation 2. We’re going to cover a couple things not covered directly in Numbers 25.

Revelation 2:14. *But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. (NKJV)*

We see two things here. One is sexual immorality and the other is idolatry. What we’re going to see is that the sexual immorality is what led to the idolatry. We can prove that in Numbers 31.

Numbers 31:16. *Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD. (NKJV)*

The point I'm making is that he said it was the immoral behavior with the women of Moab that resulted in the idolatry. That is basically the order that this came about.

Now turn to Numbers 25 and we'll look at the exact story.

Numbers 25:1. *Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. (NKJV)*

That was step number one.

2) They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. (NKJV)

The sexual immorality kind of got used as a gateway drug. That is a concept known in our world today. Oftentimes alcohol and marijuana are referred to as gateway drugs. The reason is that a person starts off having a problem with these more minor drugs in comparison. Over time that leads them to have issues with cocaine, heroin, PCP or other harder drugs. One leads to the other and that's why they are referred to as gateway drugs.

What happened is that Balaam gave Balak some advice that, you might say the advertising and marketing industry in our country has understood for a long time. Sex sells. If you look at advertising today, you see that as a common concept, especially if they are trying to market to men. Think about the various advertising you see. In beer commercials we see a good looking woman being used to market it. In car magazines you will see not just a picture of a car, but a girl in a bikini next to it. That markets to men. Men are visually oriented and that pulls them in. Sex is used to sell because it is effective.

What happened is he gets the men of Israel involved in sexual immorality with the women of Moab.

Then they say, "Come be involved in my worship."

These men are not using their brains and logic. Their hormones are taking over their thinking process. They want to appease all of this because they like the benefits. One leads to the other. Now they're involved in worshipping their gods. Satan inspired this behind the scenes. We're going to see that this is how he came after Adam in the Garden of Eden.

3) So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.

4) *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel."*

5) *So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor."*

6) *And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.*

7) *Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand;*

8) *and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel.*

9) *And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand. (NKJV)*

When you think about how he took one spear and killed them both in one shot, it's obvious to see what was happening.

Satan was behind the scenes in inspiring Balaam's advice. He said that their weakness is their sex drive, so go after them this way. It can be used as a gateway drug to lead them to other issues. He was giving the same advice that the marketing industry in America is aware of. This can motivate men's behavior and can trip them up.

This isn't a new concept. It has existed since the garden of Eden. Turn with me to Genesis 3. We're going to see how this very concept was utilized in a way to appeal to Adam. I'm going to summarize some things that we are familiar with. God puts Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. This beautiful garden has everything available to them. God told them,

"All that is here is yours. You can do as you want. I've got one rule. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the middle of the garden ... leave that alone. Don't touch that one. If you touch it, you're going to get the death penalty and it's going to be ugly, but everything else is yours."

There's only one rule. Of course, that means that Satan is going to have to come after Adam and Eve to get them to break the one rule. He wants to get them both to sin.

Satan used a tailored approach to Adam and Eve. Being male and female, they have different make-ups, they're wired differently and there are different things that would appeal to them. He approached them to come after the inherent weaknesses of the woman and the inherent weaknesses of the man. Of course, you realize when you take generalities, there's always exceptions, but generally speaking, he came after Eve in a way more likely to be successful with a woman and after Adam in a way more likely to be successful with a man. He was successful, as we know, in both cases.

Let's read through this and we can see how this worked. Genesis 3:1.

Genesis 3:1. *Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (NKJV)*

Notice how he started off framing this. The way Satan came after Eve is he manipulated her emotions. He was coming after that weakness. He starts off subtly planting the thought of, "Is God mistreating you? Has God made you a victim? Is He treating you that badly and withholding everything from you?" He knows that is not the case, but that is the thought process he's playing upon.

2) *And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;*

3) *but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"*

4) *Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.*

5) *For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (NKJV)*

Notice how he characterized this. He implies,

"God is trying to hold you down. You can be equal with Him. You just need to rise up and take your rightful place. You eat this food and you'll be as smart as He and you don't need Him for anything. He's trying to hold you down and oppress you, make you a victim and keep you from your rightful place."

He is appealing to that emotion of God being unjust and this is inequality. Do you notice in today's world that inequality is one of the favorite arguments of liberals? You can't hold back gay marriage. That's inequality. It's not about equality. It's about sin. Homosexuality is not equal with heterosexuality. It is perversion. In Satan's approach you can be equal with God. Humans aren't equal with God. It's not about equality. God is the Creator. Satan has duped her into feeling like she could be equal and she's being mistreated and being made a victim, and this works.

6) *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate ...*

She believed this. This argument worked on her.

6b) *... She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. (NKJV)*

What we're going to see here is he ate it for different reasons. Satan appealed to emotion with Eve, but he had to take a different approach to come after Adam. Before we put this together, let's turn to 1 Timothy 2. There's an important detail that we need to clarify to understand this story.

1 Timothy 2:11. *Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.*

12) *And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. (NKJV)*

He explains his logic for this in the next two verses.

13) *For Adam was formed first, then Eve.*

14) *And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (NKJV)*

The point we need to take from this is Eve was deceived; Adam was not. In other words, when Satan came to Eve and said,

“You’re not going to surely die. God is trying to make you a victim. He’s trying to hold you down and oppress you and cheat you out of being equal.”

She believes this, so that’s her motivation in taking the fruit. But we know from what it says here that Adam didn’t. He wasn’t deceived. So he knowingly did something stupid. He didn’t buy this argument, so why did he do it? **The Bible doesn’t specifically say all the details I’m going to state here today, but if we put together some logic of how men are wired and what the Bible does tell us, I think we can come up with a logical reason how he fell into this.**

Turn to Genesis 3. When God called Adam on the carpet and asked why he did this, Adam’s response is, “The woman you gave me, she made me do it.”

Of course, it’s a copout because he’s avoiding responsibility for his own actions. Eve said, “It was the serpent. He deceived me.” Both of those have arguments based in truth, but they’re both sidestepping their own personal responsibility to make the right choice.

Genesis 3:17. *Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’ ... (NKJV)*

In other words, “This is why I’m upset with you. You listened to the voice of your wife.”

In some ways this is ironic. Here we have a husband getting into trouble because he listened to his wife. Generally it’s the other way around that gets him into trouble. Also understand that from the moment Eve walked up to Adam and said, “Here Honey, try this fruit. It’s good. I had some. You’ll like it.” He was immediately in a double bind. What I mean by that is there was no pain free option through this situation for Adam. His choice was who was going to be mad at him. Am I going to have my wife upset at me or am I going to have God upset at me? Somebody is going to be mad at him. There was not a conflict free option with this scenario.

Here is what Adam should have done. We're going to analyze the situation. When Eve presents this to him, she sincerely believes what Satan has told her, so in her mind she is doing a good thing here. She has discovered the truth. This is freedom and liberation that she has found. She discovered that God was trying to hold them down and make them victims. So she's leading the family to liberation.

As we know, Adam wasn't deceived. He didn't buy that. So when this was handed to him what he should have done, which he didn't do, was show some leadership. He should have said,

"Honey, I can't do this. I can't eat this and you shouldn't have either. God gave us one rule and He was clear about that. We get the death penalty if we do this. You put us in a difficult spot by doing this."

Now, of course, she is going to defend this because in her mind the serpent gave her the scoop. This is freedom and liberation. Then what is Adam going to have to say?

"No, Honey, he was lying to you. He sold you a bill of goods."

This is going to hurt her feelings because she believes this. She is acting out of sincerity. She is going to be hurt and offended at this point. Now what's going to happen to him? It would probably sound like this.

"Well, Adam you never listen to what I think. You never consider my feelings. You must not love me. You just think you know everything and disregard what I say."

Now he's in trouble. Consider something else that was happening and this ties us back to my original point. Who is presenting this to him? It's not just his wife, it's a beautiful nude woman. He is a man. Men, in general, have a lot more testosterone than women. In men and women it's testosterone that fuels the sex drive. Visual appeal is a powerful thing for men. This beautiful woman will put his sex drive into the equation. I don't believe he made this decision thinking with logic and using his brain. I think he's looking at her and likes what he sees. He may think he would like to have some fun later with his wife.

"But if I get her ticked off at me and upset, that probably will not happen."

One of the things that tends to happen which is especially a weakness with men, if we allow the sex drive to be in charge of thinking, what tends to happen is narrow focus on immediate fun and enjoyment. The logic of long-term consequences tends to go away. To validate this, all you have to do is pay attention to the news. How many times do you see perhaps some politician that tries to carry out an affair? They do something incredibly stupid and they create photographic evidence or a video of their transgressions.

You would think this person would think, "This could be used as evidence to ruin me."

Then you see the consequences from these actions. Their career is damaged, their reputation is shot, they're in a divorce, the house probably went to the wife because there is photographic evidence of his adultery. All of this plays out and you wonder how he could do something so stupid with these massive consequences for such a short-term payoff. What happened was that brain and logic were not making these decisions.

When you consider where Adam was at, as I mentioned from the moment this situation started, Adam is in a double bind. He's going to upset somebody.

If he had thought this through, he would think, "Okay, option A, I get my wife upset at me and I'm going to deal with some conflict. I'm probably not going to have any fun for a few days because what is her perspective going to be?"

"Don't put your hands me! You never listen to me or consider my feelings. Take your hands off me, you insensitive jerk!"

He's going to hear something along those lines. But that will blow over in a few days. They're going to work through this and get beyond it. If he gets God angry he gets the death penalty and gets kicked out of the garden for the rest of his life. That is dramatically more painful. But again, if he is thinking with his brain and logic, that is the obvious conclusion to come to. I don't think he was thinking with his brain and logic to make this decision. I think his hormones and his self-interest was leading this decision and it led him astray. That's why he went along with this.

God said, "Because you listened to your wife and put that to be more important, that's why you are in trouble."

He wasn't deceived. He knowingly did this. He was not thinking logically and sensibly. When there is a conflict where it's a decision of keeping human beings happy or keeping God happy, you always want to choose keeping God happy. That would have led to some short-term painful consequences for Adam, but that would have been short-term. It would be way less devastating than being kicked out of the garden for the rest of your life. Now the death penalty is enacted.

To cover another thing, as I mentioned, this whole thing started off warning us against sexual immorality. It's certainly not just men who fall into that. If you've watched the news over the last ten years, haven't we seen a string of female school teachers having affairs with teenage boys? When I see some of the stories play out, very often they took pictures of themselves and they send it to the boy. When asked why they did that, they say that they thought the boy would keep it quiet. You work with teenage boys for a living and you thought that was going to stay private? Do you not understand the psychology of teenage boys? He's going to show this to at least a couple of friends and he's going to brag about it and they're going to tell their friends and it's going to circle the school. Then someone will call the parent and they will call the cops. It's not rocket science how this is going end. My point is that women can fall into the same thing. It

probably happens more often with men because there's a higher level of testosterone that can create that tunnel vision and not thinking through consequences.

Human beings can inherently have a weakness in this regard. Paul gave us instructions in 1 Corinthians 7 of how spouses can help protect each other from this type of temptation. It basically says that it's the responsibility of spouses in a marriage to protect each other in this way.

1 Corinthians 7:1. *Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

2) *Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*

3) *Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.*

4) *The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.*

5) *Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (NKJV)*

What he is saying is that this helps protect a person from this vulnerability. It doesn't wipe away their own responsibility for their choices if they fall into temptation. A common problem that we have today, and this has been Satan's agenda since the beginning, Satan always tries to reverse and turn upside down everything that God created. One of the biggest things he tries to do regarding sex is have as many people having sex before they get married and once they get married, try to make them stop. All you have to do is listen to stand-up comedians. Isn't that one of the standard jokes when they talk about marriage, and that is that sex stops once you get married. Go to the self-help section of any book store and you'll find a number of books on the phenomenon known today as the sexless marriage. It's a common issue today. As Paul said, this sets individuals up for sexual immorality because that temptation becomes a vulnerability that Satan can play upon. So spouses have a responsibility to look out for the other's needs. But that doesn't whitewash a case where someone has been neglected and they fall into having an affair. They can't say that they're a victim and say it's the other person's fault. It doesn't work that way. We all have to have responsibility for our own actions.

As Paul is saying, if you have knowingly neglected your spouse for months or years and they fall into temptation, you do hold some accountability. Spouses can help immunize each other to avoid this kind of temptation.

Let's turn back to 1 Corinthians 10 and pick up our next example.

1 Corinthians 10:9. *nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; (NKJV)*

This is referring to a story in Numbers 21.

Numbers 21: 4. *Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. (NKJV)*

Notice what happens when they became discouraged.

5) *And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." (NKJV)*

What a negative attitude they have here.

6) *So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.*

7) *Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.*

8) *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live."*

9) *So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. (NKJV)*

Notice how this all started. They tempted Christ because they became discouraged. They gave up hope and this is typical of someone who is very discouraged. Their focus tends to become very tunnel vision. It becomes about me and my problems and I'm suffering and about what's going on in my own life. They oftentimes lose perspective of what's going on in their world. That discouragement tends to suck them in. It can be damaging to mental health when we let that happen.

Turn to Proverbs 29

Proverbs 29:18. *Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law. (NKJV)*

I'm reading from the New King James version of the Bible. If you have one, next to the word "revelation" there is a little 1 there. In the margin it says, *prophetic vision*. In other words, when there's no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint. When we lose our focus of the future, of the overall picture and the reward of the Kingdom of God and how meaningful that is, we then just focus on our life today and our problems and what is discouraging for us today and we tend to give up. The people cast off restraint. We stop obeying, we stop overcoming, we start getting more focused on our immediate life and we lose our focus on what is really important.

John gives us a solution for this in 1 John 3

1 John 3:2. *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*

3) *And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (NKJV)*

The Greek word here for “hope” is “elpis”. It means to *anticipate with pleasure*. If we have that focus and hope in us, what happens is the opposite of casting off restraint. That person purifies himself, because they are focused on this wonderful future that they are striving towards regardless whether their life today may be difficult or challenging. They’re focusing on how wonderful that payoff is, that prophetic vision. Instead of casting off restraint, they want to purify themselves. They want to become more like God and they want to strive harder. That’s one of the lessons we have to utilize in our own lives in looking at this so that we don’t get swallowed up in the discouragement of our day-to-day trials and we continue our de-leavening process to the point of making it into God’s kingdom.

Turn with me to our last example in 1 Corinthians 10.

1 Corinthians 10:10. *nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. (NKJV)*

A good example of this is in Numbers 14. The context here is when Israel sent spies to spy out the Promised Land. They came back with a report saying that there were giants in the land and they’re bigger and more powerful, and that Israel would not be able to take them on. Joshua and Caleb were looking to God saying that God could deliver them through anything. Let’s see how this affected the people.

Numbers 14:1. *So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night.*

2) *And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! (NKJV)*

This is a very negative perspective.

3) *Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?”*

4) *So they said to one another, “Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.”*

5) *Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.*

- 6) *But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes;*
7) *and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land.*
8) *If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.'* (NKJV)

Notice that their whole focus is on God. God can get them through anything. There may be giants, but they can do this because God is on their side and if God is for us, no one can be against us.

- 9) *Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them."*
10) *And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel.* (NKJV)

Notice their response. The people didn't even want to hear an alternate perspective. It was all negative. They're all going to die and they wanted to go back to Egypt. Joshua was saying that they had God on their side and they could do this. The people wanted to stone him as a result. That's what happens when there is a loss of faith. This negative mentality overcomes someone.

The answer for us in looking at this is in Hebrews 11. The people's focus was completely off of God and on their physical situations. Their perspective became totally negative.

"We're all going to die. We need to go back to Egypt and give up on the Promised Land. It would have been better for us to die."

Hebrews 11:6. *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.* (NKJV)

That was their problem. They didn't look at it like God was on their side and if they diligently seek Him, He will give these things. He promised this land and He can deliver it. Their focus was that there were giants and they're all going to die. They wanted to give up and stone anyone who says differently. It was a totally negative focus.

The moral in all of this for us is how important it is for us to maintain faith, to maintain that focus on God, to maintain our focus on the promise of the Kingdom of God, so we are anticipating with pleasure the reward that we can have which outweighs everything.

It's like the situation that Adam was in. I mentioned the pain assessment. Which one is more painful? In his situation, if he had thought it through, it was obvious which

decision he should make. Obviously the more devastatingly painful conclusion was losing out on being in the garden for the rest of his life and having the death penalty.

In our situation, our temporary lives may be painful in what we are going through now. Isn't it dramatically more painful to end up losing out on the Kingdom of God? Isn't that a far worse outcome? So again, we need to place our hope in that, in looking forward to those promises being fulfilled and overcoming in our lives.

As I mentioned, brethren, God recorded all of these examples for us as a training tool. You can refer to Ancient Israel as God's training tool because literally it was orchestrated for that purpose. He put that much planning and effort into making sure we could be successful. He didn't just write down history to give us a record. He orchestrated it for the purpose of being able to train us. So it behooves us to be able to look back at those examples and learn the lessons of it so we don't fall into the same pitfalls that they did. We saw in their situation there was a nasty attrition rate of those who started off the journey versus those who successfully completed it. We want to be one of those who successfully completes our journey, who doesn't become attrition along the way, but who gets to hear those wonderful words ... "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."