

Is the Promise Worth the Fight?

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We are going to start this afternoon in Deuteronomy 7, if you want to be turning there. I'm going to be doing most of my scripture references from The New Living Translation of the Bible; but I'll try to be sure I call out if I change it up in the process. It's here that we find the historical account of the children of Israel approaching the Promised Land. God, through His servant Moses providing information and instruction on how they are to come into the land. We're going to be focusing today on the "approaching of the Promised Land" aspect of this. This is going to be key to what we're exploring today. Another disclaimer, we are going to do a lot of reading today. A lot more than I normally do, but in the process, we are going to take a lot of breaks and distill down and extract some details and information out of these verses as we go through them. Then we are going to apply them to our lives today.

Deuteronomy 7:1 *"When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are about to enter and occupy, he will clear away many nations ahead of you: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. These seven nations are greater and more numerous than you. (NLT)*

We'll pause there—a couple of concepts to tap into to start. First Moses tells the Israelites that God is going to clear away the nations. Or as the Hebrew word is translated for "clear away", it can be translated as "pluck off". Think of plucking a piece of ripe fruit off a vine or a tree, or "to drop, slip, or eject". It's going to be by His will, it's going to be by His power that this is going to be accomplished and the implication is that it's going to be something that God is going to be able to do in a pretty straightforward manner. Again, think of this idea. When a piece of fruit is ripe, you don't have to reef on it to get it off the vine or branch. Just reach up and it pops off.

The second is, these seven nations that are mentioned here are going to be greater, more powerful, more advanced and have the upper hand strategically over them. This is a reality that we will look at more. The first generation of the Israelites coming out of Egypt had a very firsthand, sobering experience to deal to with. What we see here then, out of the gate, God is not pulling any punches. He is being very clear about who is going to do the majority of the work, while at the same time, instilling the reality of what they are going to be coming up against. These are concepts that are going to be key for us as we move forward, so hold onto these. We'll keep reading.

2) When the Lord your God hands these nations over to you and you conquer them, you must completely destroy^[a] them. Make no treaties with them and show them no mercy. (NLT)

Notice there are two parts to this process of taking the Promised Land. God's going to hand the nations over—we read that. Then Israel is going to *destroy them utterly* as it's

translated in the New King James version. There are to be no compromises, there is to be no latitude. Why? We know from the record in scripture what ended up happening because they did compromise and did not completely destroy these nations as they were told to do. By extension, we see why God wanted them to do this in the first place. If you have a bookmark, go ahead and pop it here in Deuteronomy 7, we'll come right back. Let's take a look at this in Judges 3. We'll read the first seven verses and read this from the New King James version of the Bible. This was a section of scripture that James also covered last week. We're fast forwarding in the story quite a bit. We're going through this degree of detail this afternoon because we're extracting principles as we're going through this—in some cases, verse by verse pulling this information out.

Judges 3:1 *Now these are the nations which the LORD left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan. (NKJV)*

So it wasn't an oversight. It wasn't that God made a mistake.

"Oops, sorry about that. Can you just clean up those nations that are left. I didn't mean to leave those."

No, it was very deliberate; it was a test. A test for whom exactly?

2) (this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it) ... (NKJV)

The Contemporary English version of the Bible puts the last part of this verse this way: *Each generation would have to learn by fighting.* There's a great deal to learn through experience isn't there? Often through the rough and tumble or the fight. We're going to crystallize on that later on. For now, just hold onto this thought—that God left these nations deliberately to test and to train the less experienced generation of Israelites, giving them hands-on, real-life involvement in the process. Reading on in Judges 3.

3) namely, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath.

4) And they were left, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. (NKJV)

We read in Deuteronomy 7 some of the commands of the LORD, right? Did that not include, *utterly destroy*? So how did they fare in their execution? (Pun intended.)

5) Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

6) And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.

7) So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs. (NKJV)

The failure to obey didn't just end up with this coexistent circumstance.

"It's okay, you can stay, we can handle you, we won't fall under your influence or pressure."

But then, *co-mingling*—we read here in verse 6, the intermarrying that took place and eventually the failure of their relationship with God. The God who brought them into this land in the first place. Hold onto this, it has direct application to us and the topic at hand.

For now, let's go back to Deuteronomy 7 and pick up in verse 6 and continue reading in the New Living Translation.

Deuteronomy 7:6 *For you are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure. (NLT)*

It's not a particularly popular perspective at this point in human history, but God can and does mark as "holy", different individuals and different nations. While all human beings have the same potential to be members of God's family, not everyone has the same opportunities at the same time in history. But with this opportunity comes with an important consideration. It comes with a cost, if you will. That's another one to hold onto, we'll revisit as we go along.

7) The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! (NLT)

I read this and think of what it says in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28—you don't need to turn there, we're all familiar with it—but that's how it applies to us. *The foolish, the weak, the base, the things that are not*; it's God saying that's who I'm dealing with.

Continuing in verse 12) ...

12) "If you listen to these regulations and faithfully obey them, the Lord your God will keep his covenant of unfailing love with you, as he promised with an oath to your ancestors."

13) He will love you and bless you, and he will give you many children. He will give fertility to your land and your animals. When you arrive in the land he swore to give your ancestors, you will have large harvests of grain, new wine, and olive oil, and great herds of cattle, sheep, and goats.

14) You will be blessed above all the nations of the earth. None of your men or women will be childless, and all your livestock will bear young.

15) And the Lord will protect you from all sickness. He will not let you suffer from the terrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but he will inflict them on all your enemies! (NLT)

So, what is God doing here? He's painting a very vivid picture of what's to come. Tremendous blessings, right? Wealth, prosperity, abundance, bounty, safety, security—these are things they hadn't known. Blessings that generations before them could only imagine and they were on the threshold of—they were actually about to experience. If you need, put a bookmark here, we're going to go back to chapter 6:10-11 and layer a thought on this "blessings" idea. Thinking about the blessings they were on the verge of inheriting.

Deuteronomy 6:10 *"The Lord your God will soon bring you into the land he swore to give you when he made a vow to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land with large, prosperous cities that you did not build.*

11) The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land ... (NLT)

Talk about a blessing. Not only was there going to be opportunity, but much of it was going to be handed to them once they got in there. I often think about these verses in my own life context. Me personally, I've never had to, with my own two bare hands, build a house. I pay for a dwelling for my family, but I've never had to show up in a covered wagon somewhere and find a spot of land and clear it out, level it, figure out how to build a structure, plan all the pieces—the electrical, the plumbing, the landscaping and materials—and then actually do the work and put it together. I haven't done that, that's a lot of work. I've just gone to a realtor and said, I'm looking for a house and we find a house and we buy a house. I did not build that house. In a similar vein, I go to the grocery store and I can purchase pretty much anything I want, pretty much anytime I want. I don't have to plant it, wait for it to grow, harvest it, or nurse it, or go hunting for it or butcher it. It just comes in a neat, tidy, clean package, clearly labeled. At most I have to cook it, but it's there. I didn't have to do anything, relatively speaking, for it. I just have to consume it. I turn on the tap and water comes out. I don't have to go pump the well or walk several miles to a river or stream, let alone find water. How do I even do that? Then dig until I hit water and install a pump and make sure nobody steals my water. My point in saying all of this? We are blessed, I am blessed, you are blessed beyond measure. The question is, how aware are we of this and how does it impact our thoughts, behaviors, attitude and outlook? Hold onto that, we'll come back to it. Let's go back to Deuteronomy 7:16.

Deuteronomy 7:16 *You must destroy all the nations the Lord your God hands over to you. Show them no mercy, and do not worship their gods, or they will trap you. (NLT)*

They were reminded to remove the negative influences with prejudice, or bad things were going to happen.

17) Perhaps you will think to yourselves, 'How can we ever conquer these nations that are so much more powerful than we are?' (NLT)

We're going to come back to this but verse 17 kind of encapsulates a point that we are going to spend some time on, so hold onto it, but we'll read on for now.

18) But don't be afraid of them! Just remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all the land of Egypt.

19) Remember the great terrors the Lord your God sent against them. You saw it all with your own eyes! And remember the miraculous signs and wonders, and the strong hand and powerful arm with which he brought you out of Egypt. The Lord your God will use this same power against all the people you fear. (NLT)

So, what is the key word here—*remember*. God tells the children of Israel to *remember* all that had been done to them to get to that point. They had the experience, they had the witness, they weren't ignorant of God's great power to save and provide for them.

20) And then the Lord your God will send terror^[b] to drive out the few survivors still hiding from you!

21) "No, do not be afraid of those nations, for the Lord your God is among you, and he is a great and awesome God.

22) The Lord your God will drive those nations out ahead of you little by little. You will not clear them away all at once, otherwise the wild animals would multiply too quickly for you. (NLT)

In this metering out, if you want to put it that way, of the land to the people, God was protecting them from forces outside their control in purview. This goes hand in hand with the principle we talked about when we were reading in Judges 3. Learning through experience. If God had just hypothetically blasted the land clear and clean—no people, no animals—where would the opportunities for faith come in? This concept applies to us today as well. We'll spend some time on it shortly.

Let's take a couple of steps back—we've been doing a lot of reading in Deuteronomy 7. What is the context? What is the context for these instructions? What is the timeframe for when this is taking place in history? Let's turn back to Deuteronomy 1:1. You don't have to worry about leaving your marker in Deuteronomy 7, we are done.

Deuteronomy 1:1 *These are the words that Moses spoke to all the people of Israel while they were in the wilderness east of the Jordan River. They were camped in the Jordan Valley^[a] near Suph, between Paran on one side and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab on the other. (NLT)*

Continuing in verse 3) ...

3) But forty years after the Israelites left Egypt, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses addressed the people of Israel, telling them everything the Lord had commanded him to say. (NLT)

So, what are we seeing? We are seeing that these instructions were given after the failed first attempt. Maybe you could make an argument that they didn't know what they were going to be up against. They showed up at the front door of the Promised Land, things were a little scary so they panicked. Not true, because God did not leave them without an indication of how events were going to transpire if they would have exercised faith—that first generation. Exodus 23:20-31—we don't need to turn there; we're not going to go through it. But it's there that it records the exact same information we read in Deuteronomy 7. That context was to the first generation coming out of Egypt.

The children of Israel had ample notification of what was forthcoming, the role God was going to play in delivering what He had promised them and what fantastic blessings awaited them on the other side. But we know what happened in the first go around. Let's continue reading in Deuteronomy 1, in verse 21. Moses is recounting the events that took place in attempt number one.

21) Look! He has placed the land in front of you. Go and occupy it as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you. Don't be afraid! Don't be discouraged!

22) "But you all came to me and said, 'First, let's send out scouts to explore the land for us. They will advise us on the best route to take and which towns we should enter.'

23) "This seemed like a good idea to me, so I chose twelve scouts, one from each of your tribes.

24) They headed for the hill country and came to the valley of Eshcol and explored it.

25) They picked some of its fruit and brought it back to us. And they reported, 'The land the Lord our God has given us is indeed a good land.' (NLT)

I call that out, I think that's interesting because all of the spies admitted that the land was a good land. You can also see that is referenced in Numbers 13:27. The evidence was irrefutable. They knew this was the land that they were to inherit. But what happened?

26) "But you rebelled against the command of the Lord your God and refused to go in.

27) You complained in your tents and said, 'The Lord must hate us. That's why he has brought us here from Egypt—to hand us over to the Amorites to be slaughtered. (NLT)

Wow, really? All that was done for them. We've got the account; they had the firsthand experience. All that God had to put up with frankly. What was their response to that? *God must hate us.* That's the only reason we are out here is because God hates us. I

have to laugh because for those of us who are parents or perhaps grandparents, this one is a classic. The little one doesn't get his way, there is a learning opportunity that presents itself. My kids love it when I use that phrase—"learning opportunity". Out comes the waterworks. "You don't love me; you would let me do this or say this if you really loved me." As a parent, as a father, the thoughts that would swirl around in my head—and yes, I use the word "would" because my kids are older now and they don't often play that card—would be something between bewilderment and frustration. "We're having this conversation because I love you. If I didn't care, I wouldn't bother. It would be a lot less work and stress for me." I can only imagine what God is going through when He's hearing this take place.

28) Where can we go? Our brothers have demoralized us with their report. They tell us, "The people of the land are taller and more powerful than we are, and their towns are large, with walls rising high into the sky! We even saw giants there—the descendants of Anak!" (NLT)

Again, God had told them what they were going to be up against. It shouldn't have been a surprise and notice Moses' response.

*29) "But I said to you, 'Don't be shocked or afraid of them!
30) The Lord your God is going ahead of you. He will fight for you, just as you saw him do in Egypt.'* (NLT)

Again, this concept of remembering. The fact that they went through this—they had firsthand experience with God's power and action.

31) And you saw how the Lord your God cared for you all along the way as you traveled through the wilderness, just as a father cares for his child. (NLT)

That same degree of compassion, patience, and loving kindness.

*31 continued) ... Now he has brought you to this place.'
32) "But even after all he did, you refused to trust the Lord your God,
33) who goes before you looking for the best places to camp, guiding you with a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day.
34) "When the Lord heard your complaining, he became very angry. So he solemnly swore,
35) 'Not one of you from this wicked generation will live to see the good land I swore to give your ancestors ...'* (NLT)

Doesn't it hurt like nothing else than to have a gift spurned. Not just a gift spurned but that fundamental lack of all the care and attention that went into the process, only to have it attributed to malice in the end, when that was the furthest thing from the intention. God's anger is quite relatable, especially again in this context of a parent-child relationship. It is in that context that we most certainly see here, the Israelites truly putting "child" in children of Israel.

Continuing in verse 39) ...

39) *I will give the land to your little ones—your innocent children. You were afraid they would be captured, but they will be the ones who occupy it. (NLT)*

This ended up being the point of no return in regards to the murmuring, the complaining, the rebellion and the faithlessness. That generation, looking back to Egypt—even looking back to wandering in the desert, we'll see that in a second—lost out. As has been mentioned several times already, they were not ignorant. They were told, they had the witness, they had the experience and the miracles, yet they refused to take the gift. The promise that they all had—it was a group effort, it was the nation walking, it was God leading, it was a joint effort, they had all worked for this moment—and they said “No!”.

40) *As for you, turn around now and go on back through the wilderness toward the Red Sea*

41) *“Then you confessed, ‘We have sinned against the Lord! [Oh we didn’t mean it, sorry] We will go into the land and fight for it, as the Lord our God has commanded us.’ So your men strapped on their weapons, thinking it would be easy to attack the hill country.*

42) *“But the Lord told me to tell you, ‘Do not attack, for I am not with you. If you go ahead on your own, you will be crushed by your enemies.’*

43) *“This is what I told you, but you would not listen. Instead, you again rebelled against the Lord’s command and arrogantly went into the hill country to fight.*

44) *But the Amorites who lived there came out against you like a swarm of bees. They chased and battered you all the way from Seir to Hormah.*

45) *Then you returned and wept before the Lord, but he refused to listen. (NLT)*

So, what do we see here? They lost out, plain and simple. To make matters worse, they tried to take the land under their own power and force and suffered a crushing defeat. They had their chance. They lost their chance. God was still faithful to His promise, but to the next generation. A very powerful lesson for us and we'll get to that towards the end of our time today.

With all of that said and read—I given you a lot of, keep in mind, we'll come the “back to's”, and the hold onto that for the “now's”—but to be clear, my intention has been not to disparage those who went before us. Rather, to take to heart in what we read in 1 Corinthians 10:11-12. I'm going to read this from the New American Standard edition of the Bible.

1 Corinthians 10:11 *Now these things happened to them ... (NASB)*

The context, which we didn't read through in the preceding verses, is a light recap of the children of Israel and their experience.

11 continued) ... as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (NASB)

Does this example just exist because it's interesting? Why is it important for us to consider? Verse 12 tells us.

12) Therefore, let the one who thinks he stands watch out that he does not fall. (NASB)

It's very sobering instruction that we can pull from this historical information. Today, we are about a day and a half, a little less, from the year 2024. For us and our understanding of how the Father accounts for time, the turning of the Roman calendar isn't as big a deal for us as many in the world. However, it does bring to mind the fact that we are one year closer to the culmination of this current phase of God's plan for all of mankind. We are one year closer to the end of the age as we read in 1 Corinthians 10. We are one year closer to a time and the plan of God in which this world is going to see and experience events that we frankly have a very difficult time comprehending. Hollywood makes attempts at depicting disasters and apocalyptic type events for entertainment purposes and we can watch these things and there is a level of emotional attachment or we can get caught up in those moments. But let's face it, it takes place in the comfort of a movie theater or your living room and you have your popcorn and junior mints. A couple hours later, it's done and maybe you remember it, maybe you don't, but you move on with your life. We have been told, just as the children of Israel were told, approaching the Promised Land, what was going to transpire, or what is going to transpire for us in the end times. We're not going to take the time today to go through any of these events, but the question we need to ask ourselves is, when we start to see these things transpire—these things we know are going to happen—when the end times really start to ramp up, what is our reaction going to be? Are we going to act like the children of Israel approaching the Promised Land?

We read earlier, the whole "God must hate us" perspective that they had. Let's layer onto that a little of what we read in Numbers 14. We're going to read the first four verses from the New Living Translation. This is another passage that James spent some time last week, so we're going to revisit it here today. Again, this is the children of Israel, the spies report, this is their reaction.

Numbers 14:1 *Then the whole community began weeping aloud, and they cried all night.*

2) Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died in Egypt, or even here in the wilderness!" they complained. (NLT)

So not only were they looking back to Egypt, they were in essence saying even this wilderness is better than what is going on here. Question for us—when it comes right down to the end, when conditions will be at their worst, will we give up and long for the

ease and comfort that Babylon is going to afford? Going back to Egypt or wandering around in our past wilderness—whatever that might be for our individual lives?

3) *“Why is the Lord taking us to this country only to have us die in battle? Our wives and our little ones will be carried off as plunder! Wouldn’t it be better for us to return to Egypt?”* (NLT)

This is a big one. It’s almost akin to the, “Do what you want to me, but leave my family out of this”. Will end time persecution potentially include the proverbial gun to one’s head—literally or figuratively—or rather a gun to a spouse’s head? A husband, a wife, a son, a daughter—will that be my breaking point? Will that be your breaking point?

4) *Then they plotted among themselves, “Let’s choose a new leader and go back to Egypt!”* (NLT)

This has interesting applications to us as well. Will we seek compromise in leadership from a source other than our Creator? Will we seek an easy road that Satan’s authority on earth will advertise that will give us what we want, or at least take away the really hard stuff or the pain and pressure of having to live this way of life? We’re framing this from the perspective of the end times, but I would submit even more importantly, there is practical application to us today. Can these not be attitudes, perspectives that we can have under duress today? When we are going through trials, hardships or even just discomforts. Do we question why we have started down this path of this way of life in the first place? Do we ever entertain the “Why me?” or “God must hate me” thoughts that we read earlier? Does the thought cross our minds that a just God, a kind, loving God, wouldn’t allow me to go through this because look at what it does to my family or look what it does to my friends. Surely that can’t be the case. Do we ever in our minds ever threaten to cede control of our lives to someone or something else? Or become authorities unto ourselves because we aren’t comfortable with our situation or our circumstance.

This is a dangerous position to be in and sobering to consider. Why? Because this is a function of character or fundamental flaws therein. To ask a tough question:

“If in the situations we find ourselves in today, we struggle to stay faithful, what of those future struggles that we may have yet to face, when the temperature gets really heated up?

Frankly, it can be easier to do the right thing when under adrenaline, drive or extreme duress. Think of that gun to the head scenario. The hard part of the long, slow, slog of day to day living that wears our faith down day after day. Or we can be lulled to sleep spiritually as the days and the months and the years go by. Not unlike the days of this time of year. It’s cold, mostly dark or mostly foggy like it is here in Tri-Cities and the motivation we may have had in the summer and the fall, to be active and productive in our lives, turn into nothing more than “Let’s grab a blanket and sit in front of a fire and stay warm and comfortable.”

With all of this in mind, the question I would like us to consider today—and for those who like titles:

Is the Promise Worth the Fight?

Is what we stand to inherit, is our calling and election, is being part of the very family of God, worth what we'll be in one form or another now and in the future? It's going to be a fight. We sing the hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers" right? We are indeed to battle and fight. We're not just to do our time in the reserves during the peaceful times for the GI bill to go to college, we are in a war for our spiritual lives, plain and simple. As if I haven't been encouraging enough to everyone yet, from a human perspective, from a physical perspective, all indicators are that this fight, this war we are fighting, we are destined to lose. What? Turn with me to Luke 14 and take a peek at this. We're going to start in verse 26. Another passage of scripture that James covered last week as well. We are all very familiar with this section of scripture, but we are framing this from this idea that it's an uphill battle at best.

Luke 14:26 *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)*

We're all very familiar with this. The New Living Translation inserts "*by comparison*" after the word "*hate*" here. So, *he who does not hate by comparison, father, mother, wife, children*. The Contemporary English version of the Bible puts it this way, "*unless you love Me more than father, mother, wife, children*" etc. It doesn't really matter, by any reckoning, Jesus is telling those who choose to heed the call that He offers, you have to be willing to sacrifice your most cherished human relationships. Even your own life. From a physical, human perspective, we're being asked to give up everyone we know. James framed it as a social structure last week in his message. We have to be willing to walk away from all of our social structures for one. That makes you think.

Continue in verse 31) ...

31) Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

32) Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

33) So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (NKJV)

Verse 31 is always the one that makes me stop and think, when reading through Luke 14. We didn't read the first analogy that Jesus gives here in counting the costs, but it's that of building a building. Simply put, make sure you have what you need. Make sure you have the supplies and the funds so that when you set out to build your building, you

can actually finish it. Seems pretty straightforward but when we look at verse 31, the analogy paints a picture of a battle in which the odds are sorely stacked against you. On paper, 10,000, 20,000—who's going to win based on those numbers? It reminds me of the story of Gideon's army. We're not going to go through it but you may remember, it was whittled down to 300 men against an adversary that (I wasn't able to find a number) but in Judges 6:33, it says that a 300-man army went against all the Midianites and Amalekites. I'm guessing orders of magnitude, more than 300 was the army they were up against. From a physical perspective, not a great deal. The world, Satan, our carnal human nature, is our own seven nation army that's greater, more powerful, stronger, smarter, faster, better equipped and has the tactical advantage. The question remains, is it worth it? Is the promise we have been given worth the fight?

Academically, I think we would all answer a resounding "Yes!" or we wouldn't be sitting here listening to me, would we? I would like to take from the case study of the Israelites we've gone through today, to share some thoughts, some things to bear in mind to help us stay strong and, in turn, stand to inherit our Promised Land. If it be a gun to your head or a fiery furnace or a lion den's moment—or just dealing with the day to day. The pressures that we face, thorns in the flesh, covered in boils sitting on a ash heap—pick your affliction. How to stand amidst the struggles of the life we have each individually been granted to live, and persevere in, to the very end.

What can happen to us over time? We are immersed in this world. We cannot escape it. This time of year, we are especially exposed to how contrary the ways of men are to the way of life that we are trying to live. Even this morning at the hotel we are staying at, we come out of our hotel room door, halls are quiet but what's blasting over the speakers? Christmas music and I'm terrible with music. I hear something and it gets stuck in my head. I'm walking around all morning with jingles in my head. You can't escape it. The danger lies in the progression that we talked about earlier, that we looked at in Judges 3. You start to become accepting. "That's alright, I can deal with that." To, compromise and then intermingling between God's way of life, Satan's way of life, the pulls of life, etc. Before long we derail, we forget where we came from, we forget who got us to where we are today in the first place. We end up worshipping other gods in our lives.

Is the promise worth the fight? Five thoughts to share with you, in no particular order, from the lessons that we can pull from the children of Israel approaching the Promised Land.

1. We have been informed.

We are without excuse. Just as the children of Israel were informed, so are we. What exactly are we informed about? We have, through the prophetic duality of the Old Testament, as well as Jesus' actual words, a pretty clear picture of the conditions extant at the end of the age. God isn't hiding anything from us. Some of the descriptions of what is going to take place—think book of Revelation—are pretty graphic. I don't think any of us would argue that it's going to be ugly. I don't think any of us would argue that the dissent of that ugliness has already begun and is accelerating even today.

It's not just that we have academic knowledge of these things. We are, and will continue, to experience the ramifications of the culmination of sin and Satan's way of life, destroying God's creation. But why? Why do we have to go through these things? Why do we have to have these experiences? Why do we have to utterly destroy those seven nations armies in our lives? Because, just as with the children of Israel, God is allowing these things for our growth, our experience, our building of character and building of faith.

Knowing about the end times or about hardships that we will have to suffer in our lives in general is actually just one side of the story. What else are we informed of? What else do we know? In Romans 8:28 there is a very familiar passage. I mentioned the diamond analogy; we are going to look at a slightly different facet of this verse. We are asking the question, what are we informed of? We know bad stuff is going to happen. At the end bad stuff is going to happen in our lives. What does Romans 8:28 tell us? I'm reading this from the New American Standard Edition of the Bible.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.* (NASB)

No matter what happens, just as a human father will care for his child, God cares for us. We are His children and He provides what we need, when we need it, for our ultimate good. The focus is, we know this—we know it. 2 Corinthians 5:1.

2 Corinthians 5:1 *For we know that if our earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made by hands, eternal in the heavens.* (NASB)

The end has to come for there to be a new beginning and we have a marvelous inheritance in God's house. We know this—very positive. Hebrews 10:30. What else do we know?

Hebrews 10:30 *For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people."* (NASB)

So, we know that there will be justice. We live in a world filled with inequity today, but God's judgment and fairness will win in the end. 1 John 3:14 and we'll read the first $\frac{3}{4}$'s of the verse.

1 John 3:14 *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers and sisters...* (NASB)

How we live and how we treat one another, no matter how contrary or backward. Again, harking back to James' sermon last week—he talked about the "salmon swimming against the stream". We are swimming upstream in this way of life. No matter how

foolish or silly it may seem by the world's standards, we know that we are living a life in the Spirit and if we are doing so, we are living a true life. Still in 1 John, in chapter 4:13.

1 John 4:13 *By this we know that we remain in Him and He in us, because He has given to us of His Spirit.* (NASB)

We'll touch on this a little bit next, but we have the most powerful force in the universe with us at all times. We know this and can carry this with confidence. Still in 1 John, chapter 5:15, breaking into the verse.

1 John 5:15 *And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask ...* (NASB)

We don't worship an image of wood, stone, or plastic, filled with man's knowledge of good and evil and yes, technology gizmos "I'm looking at you". We worship a God who is living and is listening. Verse 20.

20) And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (NASB)

I think verse 20 wraps this up very neatly. We know—we have confidence and assurance—that Jesus came, lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and has now given us the Spirit that we can know Him and know our Father intimately. I could go on and it might be an interesting study by itself to look at all the "we know....". Look for that phrase, just in 1 John and look at the context and what is being described and articulated. For now, it suffices to say—we know. We are without excuse. We are not ignorant. We may not always acknowledge it. We may rather wish we didn't know now, but we do. We can take a great deal of comfort and encouragement that we are not going into this way of life or going through this way of life blind. Yes, we are told to *walk by faith* and in the day to day, that can be a real test. But our faith is bolstered by what we have been given—both in word and in experience. This all ties neatly into the second thought that we will talk about this afternoon.

2. God has given us everything we need to succeed.

We have already covered this in quite a bit of detail so I'm not going to spend too much time on this second thought. Thinking about the children of Israel coming into the Promised Land, they were provided for every step of the way. Pillar of cloud and fire, clothes not wearing out. As James put it last week, food falling from the sky six days a week. Most importantly, God providing all of these things. Promising to *fight their battles* and then you go through all this—I'm going to give you homes, fields, vineyards, water, everything you need, just come in and take it. How about us? What blessings have we been given that make our fight fightable? We have touched on a few already. We have the word, both the written Bible and the Word indwelling. Through the Christ we have understanding of what we read and study. In spite of the fact that we are *the weak and the base things* of this world, we have been set aside, we are holy, we are recipients of

God's love because it is His will. Not because we are great, or we are smart, or we are mighty, or we have it all figured out. We have one another to help, support, and edify. We have been given so much in terms of material blessings. Even those less fortunate in this country have more than, I would offer, most human beings have had that have ever lived. We didn't really have to work all that hard for it, relatively speaking. Not to say this is wrong at all, but to simply cultivate awareness. That these are gifts that God has given us to help us succeed in our journey towards our spiritual Promised Land.

3. Compared to God, the “giants” in the world are nothing at all.

Thinking back to the spies' report—the children of Israel come to the Promised Land, “Let's send some people in to scope it out and figure out what's going on.” Or even Luke 14, the king with the 10,000 looking at the king with the 20,000. On paper, it doesn't look good. We face enemies in this life that could very easily break us. Compared to the forces that work in this world, we are indeed like grasshoppers. Compared to God, the largest of those giants in our lives—I think of the analogy of a tomato on a vine; when it's ripe you don't have to pull, you tap it and it pops off. The wind blows and ripe tomatoes fall off the vine. We had that happen a few years ago with tomatoes, they ended up on the ground. It's not a problem at all. There's no comparison for God. In that light, do we have the faith and trust that God will clear away those giants in our lives. It's not going to be done overnight. *Little by little* like we read, but He will do it. Or do we ask the same question that the Israelites asked? *How can we ever conquer these nations that are so much more powerful than we are?*

Let's look at that question for a second. Where is the focus?

How can “we” conquer these nations?

The focus was on their own efforts. Our efforts—like when the Israelites said, “*Oops sorry, do over. We'll take our swords and go do this.*” How did that end? Badly, forces crumbled in defeat. That will happen to us too. But our God is an awesome and great God and overshadows these giants in our lives. The question is, do we believe it? Do we have trust in God's sovereignty in His creation and acknowledging that perhaps these trials and hardships are in our lives to teach us, to train us and to know war. We can learn by fighting—we covered that in Judges 3. Know what it's like to battle sin and to exercise faith.

4. We can experience part of the reward now.

In Numbers 13, we'll take just a quick peak at this from the example of the children of Israel that we have been going through this afternoon. These are the spies, they went in and this is part of what they experienced.

Numbers 13:23 *Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and from there they cut off a branch with a single cluster of grapes; and they carried it on a pole between two men, with some of the pomegranates and the figs. (NASB)*

Out here in the Tri-Cities area, Eastern Washington, this is Washington wine country. Maybe you've seen a cluster of grapes that big out here—I don't know. I never have. I have never seen a cluster of grapes so big that two grown men had to carry it with a pole. That's pretty epic and for it to be recorded in the Bible, this probably wasn't an everyday affair. The point being, even before they came into the Promised Land, they were able to catch a glimpse of the bounty that was to be had; that was awaiting them on the other side. This is a point that can easily be overlooked for us, for myself. Or lost in the midst of all the negativity that we see and experience.

As alluded to already, we have so much in terms of blessings that we can enjoy now in our lives. When we live God's way of life, we can experience a taste of what it will be like when all creation is no longer subject to sin. What do I mean by this? We can use a physical analogy. You eat right, you take care of your body, you get plenty of sleep—there are actual tangible, physical rewards for those things. When we practice God's law—not stealing, not lying, keeping the Sabbath—there are direct, positive results of that today that we can enjoy. We get a snapshot of what this experience looks like in the New Testament context in Acts 2:46-47 from the Bible in Basic English. We've come through the giving of the Spirit, the first Pentecost and this is the epilogue of that story.

Acts 2:46 *Day by day, going in agreement together regularly, to the Temple and taking broken bread together in their houses, they took their food with joy and with true hearts.*

47) Giving praise to God and having the approval of all the people. And every day the number of those who had salvation was increased by the LORD. (NASB)

What do we see here? What is the picture painted? When I read through this, I think of things like *love your neighbor as yourself, living at peace with all men, love the brotherhood*. We see *giving, sharing, serving*—what are these? These are core principles of our faith and they are being practiced, being put into use, and what is the result, what is the outcome? *Joy, agreement, unity, true hearts, things like pure motivations and intentions, approval of all the people*. I'm just taking snippets out—numbers increased. All these positive benefits and outcomes of the power of the Spirit at work, absolutely no doubt, but also the resulting actions and responses of the people as well. To be clear, and this has been a theme of many recent messages here in Pacific, this isn't to say that doing or being good automatically and always results in positive physical outcomes. That's not the focus—it isn't on material benefit in this life or success, rather it's about our preparation for the future. This might be my last shoutout to James—might not—as James has stated several times in his messages, “God's love is about doing good and not feeling good.” But as physical human beings, if we absolutely never had anything ever good at all, if we got no taste of the reward, how would that feel? How would we stay motivated if we didn't have just a glimpse? If the spies who went into the Promised Land didn't bring back the grapes, pomegranates and the figs, what would the impact of that have been? We don't know and obviously the result was bad enough as it was, but it's an interesting thought.

Even consider Job. In the end, after all he went through, he was able to experience restoration and blessing at the end of the story. So, let's not lose hope or sight of the opportunities that we have—to experience just a little bit of tomorrow, today.

5. Once we commit, we are committed.

Let's look at Luke 9:61-62. It is breaking into the story and we're familiar with verse 62 and how this story ends.

Luke 9:61 *Another also said, "I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say goodbye to those at my home."*

62) *But Jesus said to him, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."* (NASB)

I suppose we can consider this our final cautionary tale, if you will, for today. For those of us who have been baptized and have *counted the cost* the best we can and made commitments to follow our Lord, going back is not an option. Looking at our study of the children of Israel approaching the Promised Land, they followed Moses all the way to the threshold. They were right there, ready to take it and then they didn't. They changed their minds and then it ended very badly for them. Harking back to 1 Corinthians—for us—*he who thinks he stands*, take heed. An important thing for us to consider is once we commit, once our hand is on that plow, forward is the only direction. When the field gets hard as we're pushing, we can reflect on the previous four thoughts that we have talked about this afternoon to help us get through. That we know it's going to be hard. It is unequivocal in scripture and throughout own experience—it's going to be hard. But we know we have everything that we need to be successful. That God is far bigger than that tough soil we are plowing and that we can experience the fruits of our labors in part today in the material and spiritual blessings that we have in our lives. But we *have to, have to, have to, keep our hand on that plow and not look back.*

Not long for Egypt, not long for another way, or another authority in our lives, or an easier road. There is no other road to life. We use it or we lose it. So, in the end the question, as we turn the page into the year 2024 (believe it or not), and face another calendar year—with the world straining under the weight of mankind's abuses, ineptitude, Satanic influences, categorical rejection of the Creator and the few that seek His face—is this: Is the promise worth the fight? Is what we will inherit—the very Kingdom of God—worth what we have to endure and battle in our lives today? Will the day to day, the long hard slog, wear down our resolve, erode our faith and tempt us into accepting those Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites in our lives? Eventually leading to our departure from the faith. When the end times hit, fast and furiously and the pressure is on, when we are on the threshold of our Promised Land—whether it's end time or end of our lives as we know them—what are we going to seek? Will we long for the ease and comfort that sin and our human nature can provide? Let's take courage and step forward each and every day of our lives, fighting this good fight to the very finish.