

# WRITINGS OF GEORGE ANDRE

by George Andre

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*A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by George Andre, compiled for study and devotional reading.*

19 Chapters

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## 1.0.1. Moses — The Man of God

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Moses — The Man of God

G. André

## 1.0.2. Introduction

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### 1.0.3. About the Author

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About the Author Is it possible to combine a fruitful Christian life with a successful business career? For many years, Mr. André has worked for an international company. However, his first love has been to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. While principally involved in Bible camp work in his native country for a number of years, he has maintained a keen interest and involvement in the work of the Lord worldwide.

Mr. André has preached the Word of God both orally and with his pen. Although the many books he has written are better known in French, German, Italian and some other languages, an increasing number of them are being translated into English. They are available from Believers Bookshelf, Inc.

### 1.0.3. Table of Contents

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## 1.0.4. PREFACE

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### PREFACE

Numerous young people in Switzerland and other parts of Europe have been blessed by the ministry of this book. Presented first in lecture form in a camp setting, its influence and usefulness greatly expanded when it was printed in French, then in German.

Now by the help of God we are privileged to present this ministry in English. It should be especially useful for study by Bible classes, youth camps, Sunday Schools, etc., because of the discussion questions provided at the end of each chapter. With appreciation for the diligent work of Daniel K. Dreyer in translating this book into English, we commend it to the prayerful study of young and old.

“. . . Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a testimony” (Hebrews 3:5). “Take, my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord for an example “ (James 5:10).

Grant W. Steidl, June 1975 PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

Many editorial changes have been made in this second edition. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New Kings James Version, Copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Grant W. Steidl, March 1990

J. N. Darby’s Synopsis of the Books of the Bible and C. H. Mackintosh’s Notes on Exodus and Numbers will help the reader to a deeper understanding of this outline of the life of Moses. It is recommended that the Scripture passages listed under each chapter heading be read carefully before proceeding into the chapter itself.

## 1.0.5. About the book

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### About the book

Moses was born in a period of great stress and persecution by Pharaoh upon the children of Israel. But Moses' parents had great faith in God and so could commit their beautiful child to His care and keeping. Many lessons can be learned by Christian parents today from the example of Amram and Jochebed.

What prompted Moses to forsake the riches of Egypt for the reproach of Christ?

Why did God allow a great man like Moses to spend 40 years on the back side of the desert?

Learn from Moses' handling of disappointments and discouragements how you can and should react to distressing circumstances. The author, in his own straightforward manner, makes many applications from the life of Moses, his personality, his training and his instruction in the path of God, that will benefit all who will read this book with a desire to please the Lord.

## 1.1 Chapter 01 - CHILDHOOD, YOUTH, CALLING

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Chapter 01 CHILDHOOD, YOUTH, CALLING 1. THE PARENTS' FAITH:

Hebrews 11:23; Acts 7:20-22; Exodus 2:1-10.

Amram and Jochebed, according to Exodus 6:18-20, belonged to the tribe of Levi and to the family of the Kohathites. It was a family which in the future would perform such important duties in relation to the tabernacle.

Three children at this point are mentioned in the word of God: Miriam — probably ten to thirteen years old at Moses' birth; Aaron — three years older than Moses (Exodus 7:7); and Moses.

According to Pharaoh's decree, issued shortly before the birth of Moses, the Israelites were to cast into the river every son that was born. Only the female infants were to be kept alive. What an exercise of soul it must have been for Jochebed during the long months prior to the birth of the child! Would it be a daughter whom she would have the right to keep? The child came into the world and it was a son; but not an ordinary boy. By faith his parents discerned in him a special beauty. Acts 7:20 reveals that he was "exceedingly lovely" (literally "beautiful to God"). Hebrews 11:23 expressly emphasizes that it was because the child was beautiful that his parents hid him.

There was no room in the world for this one whom God singled out from birth as special for Himself. Centuries later, there will be no room at Bethlehem for the Child Jesus. King Herod will try to slaughter Him as Pharaoh tried to destroy the child Moses. As then, so today faith adheres to the One whom the world despises, the One who in the eyes of faith is "more beautiful than the sons of men."

Moses' parents were not afraid of the king's edict. For the first three months they did everything they could to keep the child hidden. Yet the moment arrived when this was no longer possible. With what care the mother prepared the ark of reeds, plastered it with resin and pitch, put the child in it, and placed it near the bank of the Nile River. There Miriam would keep watch on him from afar. For a few years the children of Christian parents are under the special influence, protection, and care of their mothers. Then the moment comes when they must be exposed to the outside world through school and contact with other children in the neighborhood. Knowing very well that she cannot keep her treasures with her for ever, a Christian mother will be careful to take every possible precaution to prevent her child from becoming exposed to harmful influences during this new period. Above all, she will need faith to commit him to the care of the Lord who is able to keep him.

How marvelous the answer to the confidence expressed by Moses' parents! The hand of God appears in every detail: the selection of the place and hour at which Pharaoh's daughter comes down to bathe in the river; her compassion at the sight of the child; Miriam's presence of mind; and the kindness of the princess who delivers the child to his own mother for the first years of his life. At home Moses will remain under the training of his parents — "The child grows." Later on he will

be in the royal place where the daughter of Pharaoh will bring him up “for herself” (Acts 7:21). Moses, instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, will become mighty in his words and deeds just as Jesus was mighty in deed and word, in Luke 24:19 and Acts 1:1! Also, Moses knows the pleasures of Egypt. Which of the two educations will prevail? Will it be the one imparted during the few years at his father’s home where Amram (whose name means “God of thy father” Exodus 3:6) and Jochebed assuredly did not neglect to speak to Moses of the Lord and of His promises to His people? Or will it be the one provided at the court? Will the many years at the court erase even the memory of what Moses had heard in his parents’ home? Is not this problem still very prevalent? Christian parents endeavor to bring up their children for the Lord instructing them in the Word of God. They also take them to Sunday school, to the meetings, and to special occasions for further teaching from the Word. On the other hand, the influence of studies, apprenticeship, and/or professional training will certainly be felt; and it will cause a young heart to forget what it had received at home from the parents unless there is personal and living faith in the Lord Jesus. The case of King Joash demonstrates that a faith based exclusively on training vanishes when the supporting influences disappear.

## 2. THE CHOICE AT THE AGE OF FORTY:

(Exodus 2:11-15; Acts 7:23-29; Hebrews 11:24-26). When Moses had reached the age of forty it came into his heart to visit his brethren. He went out to them, looking on their burdens. Certainly he had not learned at the court of Pharaoh that these despised Hebrews were his brethren; still less that God had made promises about them (Genesis 15:13). However, the teaching received from his parents was still deep-rooted in his heart. The day of decision arrived, it seems, when he was to be officially called “the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” Moses refused! (Hebrews 11:24). We may well imagine that the reaction of the princess (about which the Word of God says nothing) was terrible. Moses’ renunciation involved immense loss in terms of an honored position, material advantages, riches and “delights.”

Similarly, we live in days when we must be able to say “no.” Joseph’s action in Genesis 39:10 illustrates this. In a situation where a wholehearted decision to cling to the Lord was required in order to refuse, break off, and go away from temptation, he triumphed by God’s grace.\*

Even if we are never called to renounce all that was refused by Moses, we can be sure that we also will face tempting circumstances. Some material advantages of this contaminated world will have to be declined so that they might not stand in the way of our fellowship with the people of God — even if such a decision involves a measure of self denial. This takes more than the negative side of renouncing. Moses “chose.” What did he choose? “To suffer affliction with the people of God.” Although our level of decision may not reach to that of Moses, we also will find many opportunities to choose in favor of those whom the Lord loves. The Word says that the “pleasures of sin,” as real as they may seem, are only for a time; “but he that does the will of God abides for eternity” (1 John 2:17). Moses’ renunciation and choice would later confer on him the authority necessary to ask others, especially his own people, to do the same in their measure.

Hebrews 11:1-40 gives us some insight into the heart of Moses and reveals to us the secret that prompted his faith. He did not choose by sheer force of will or through asceticism, but because he “esteemed” the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. The museum of Cairo and the tomb of Tutankhamen prove that no little wealth was meant by these riches.

However, that which pertained to Christ (although no doubt only in figure) had more value for Moses' heart than everything else; it was a greater treasure!

Moses thought that his brethren would certainly admire his self-denial and devotion to their cause. As Acts 7:25 says, "he supposed that his brethren would understand that God would deliver them by his hand." What terrible disappointment! "They did not understand." The very Israelite whom he was reproving for wronging his neighbor "pushed him away." What was the good of having "refused," "chosen," and "esteemed," if this was the result?

Fearing Pharaoh, Moses fled to Midian and sat down near a well. There the most bitter reflections must have weighed on his mind, but he did not lose courage. As he witnessed the vexations to which the daughters of Reuel were exposed, he did not remain engrossed in his own pain but came to their help. Thus he remains in character a deliverer and a servant.

How was all that possible? Hebrews 11:1-40 reveals it: "He looked to the reward." His eyes were not cast in the direction of the immediate future with its lost advantages and ongoing afflictions. Even at the well of Midian and in the depth of distress, his actions prove that faith was enduring in his heart. He was looking farther ahead and higher up. In fact, the path which he had begun to walk was to lead him to the song of triumph at the Red Sea, to the revelations of Sinai, to the glory reflected on his face, to the intimate relationship with the Lord on Pisgah, and finally to the glorious appearing on the mount of transfiguration.

There is another side to this account. Before going out to his brethren in Egypt, he did not consult the Lord. The Lord's time had not yet come for the people nor for Moses. It was in his own strength that Moses was going, and this way did not exclude the fear of men. On the contrary, "he turned this way and that way" (Exodus 2:12).

However, in Midian under quiet conditions and alone with God, he would be trained as a shepherd, just as Jacob and Joseph had been trained before him and as David would yet be trained. Moses' faith was real and deep, but he needed to pass through God's schooling.

### 3. THE VISION AT THE AGE OF EIGHTY:

(Exodus 3:1-22; Exodus 4:1-31; Acts 7:30-35).

"The time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham" (Acts 7:17). Years of silent training had forged the instrument. For Moses, the wilderness of Midian was what the prison had been for Joseph, what Cherith and Sarepta would be for Elijah, and what Arabia would be for Paul.

If in our lives God sometimes allows periods such as these that we cannot understand — if sickness or other circumstances interrupts our work and we are put aside, should we not use such seasons to feed more closely on the Word and to learn in the school of God what we would never learn in the activity and turbulence of our normal lives? Such periods can be wasted on vain regrets or in scattered and futile endeavors; but if we use them wisely, they will form the foundation for blessed service on behalf of the people of God.

God is now about to reveal Himself to Moses and call him to the service for which He had been preparing him from birth. How extraordinary and unique is the moment when a soul feels the presence of God and His holiness in a special way; when he hears His voice distinctively! Such a

vision will mark his entire existence from then on, and render it fruitful or sterile according to the response made.

“Come now therefore, and I will send you” (Exodus 3:10). The moment of God has arrived. Formerly Moses wanted to go without waiting for God’s time, but now he is about to hesitate. God does not say “Go” but “Come.” It is with Him, in His company and fellowship that Moses is sent. However, Moses is not disposed to respond. He brings before God four successive objections: Who am I?...I am unable...I am not prepared...I will not know how to act. How many similar excuses have arisen from generation to generation in the hearts of those whom God was calling? “I will be with you” is the peremptory and clear answer which should suffice for every servant. A Gideon, a Jeremiah, the apostles at the feet of their risen Lord, Paul in prison, and how many others have heard this answer and have made the happy experience of the preciousness of God’s presence in the way! For Moses, however, this promise was not sufficient. He raises another objection: “The sons of Israel will say to me: ‘What is his name?’ What shall I say unto them?” Full of gracious condescension, God then reveals himself as the One who ever is: “I am that I am.” Before, in, and after time, He ever remains the Word which “in the beginning . . . was with God” — Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today and for ever.

Every necessary instruction is given to Moses but still he is not satisfied. Pleadingly he says: “But behold, they will not believe me” (Exodus 4:1). God then gives him three signs through which his mission is to be accredited:

(1) The staff changed into a serpent which Moses can take by the tail. This is an illustration of the power which God imparts to His instrument in the presence of the enemy.

(2) Moses’ hand that becomes leprous when placed into his bosom and then afterwards is made pure. This shows that God alone can heal the leper and purify the sinner.

3) The water of the Nile (the source of life for the Egyptians) that is changed into blood. This is a proof that judgment is about to come upon this rebellious people.

Moses, however, is still not willing to go: “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant” (Exodus 4:10). Earlier when he went out of Pharaoh’s court, Moses had been mighty in words, but the years spent in the wilderness taught him the small value of this natural ease of speech. The Lord tells him: “And now go, and I will be with your mouth, and will teach you what you shall say.”

Once more Moses raises an objection, though with more moderation this time (v.13). Compelled by the Lord’s anger, he finally yields; he goes and asks his father-in-law’s permission to leave and go back to Egypt, and prepares his return. It seems, however, that he delays in Midian and again the Lord must remind him to “Go, return to Egypt” (Exodus 4:19). On the way God gives him instructions, and also brings to his attention a secret and deep obstacle — a small sin perhaps, but God sees everything and allows nothing in His servant that is contrary to His clearly revealed Word. As a concession to the Midianites, probably to Zipporah, Moses had not circumcised his son. Now amid the dust and confusion of the caravan, alive with people and animals, Moses becomes ill and is about to die. Zipporah discerns in it — and rightly so — the judgment of God, and hastens to perform the neglected rite of circumcision. Moses is restored in soul and body, and goes to meet Aaron. Together they will carry out the work for which God is sending them. In all

likelihood, Zipporah goes back to her father. She will join Moses again at the mountain of God (Exodus 4:25).

What would have become of Moses, had he not obeyed on that supreme day of his life when God called him? No doubt, he would have remained in Midian, an unknown shepherd of whom we would never have heard. Israel would have remained in the bondage of Egypt; or rather God would have used another instrument to deliver the people.

Compelled by the faithful call of God, Moses answered. Through the years, he grew in the intimacy of the one whom he had learned to know as the God of grace who had appeared to him “in the bush” (Deuteronomy 33:16).

THINKING THINGS THROUGH 1. Describe some of the circumstances which God arranged to preserve Moses in spite of Pharaoh’s commandment.

2. Do you face decisions in your life similar to those faced by Moses when he “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter?” What do you learn from his example that will help you to make the right decision?

3. Why did God allow a great man like Moses to spend forty years of his life in obscurity, tending sheep?

4. Consider again the four objections raised by Moses when God would send him to deliver the Israelites. How do they compare to objections you may have been using to resist God’s will in your life? What is God’s answer to these objections?

## 1.2. Chapter 02 - In Egypt - The Deliverer

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### Chapter 02 In Egypt — The Deliverer

(Read Exodus 5:1-23; Exodus 6:1-30; Exodus 7:1-25; Exodus 8:1-32; Exodus 9:1-35; Exodus 10:1-29; Exodus 11:1-10; Exodus 12:1-51; Acts 7:35-36; Hebrews 11:27-28)

1. FAILURES At the burning bush Moses had received an immediate mission that was perfectly clear: “Bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10). God had not concealed from him the obstacles he would face: “I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a powerful hand. I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof; and after that he will let you go” (Exodus 3:19-20). There in Midian God had even given Moses to understand that Pharaoh’s resistance would be terrible, compelling Him to take the extreme measure of killing his (Pharaoh’s) firstborn son.

Arriving in Egypt, Moses and Aaron gather all the elders of the children of Israel who accede to the message, bow their heads and worship (Exodus 4:29-31). Feeling quite encouraged, they go to Pharaoh and ask him to let the people go and celebrate a feast to the Lord in the wilderness. Pharaoh’s insolence soon reduces their courage, but they still try to say to him: “The God of the Hebrews has met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days’ journey into the wilderness ...” (Exodus 5:3). The royal rebuff is explicit: “Why do ye, Moses and Aaron, wish to have the people go off from their works? Away, to your burdens!”

Instead of alleviating the people’s burden, this first interview only makes it heavier still. Part of the Israelites must scatter about the country and gather the straw necessary to make brick; yet the same amount of bricks is required each day. Therefore, a reduced number of people must work all the more in order to fulfill the requirements. The officers of the children of Israel try to complain directly to Pharaoh without going through Moses and Aaron, but this only makes matters worse.

It is easy to understand Moses’ distress at that hour, one of the darkest in his life. The Lord has not delivered the people at all through him. On the contrary, the people are oppressed more than ever and those whom he wanted so much to serve reproach him severely. What should he do? Should he once more give up, leave the people to their fate, and return to Midian?

Moses is at the end of his resources. Nevertheless, his faith stands fast (Hebrews 11:27). In his deep distress he returns to the Lord (v. 22) and pours out before Him his affliction. Like so many times later on, he experiences the grace of his Lord who does not rebuke him. On the contrary, He reveals Himself still more to him. Is there not an important lesson for each of us to learn through the misfortunes, disappointments and trials of this life? One person works hard to pass an examination and yet fails. Another tends a loved one with great devotion, and yet this loved one is taken away by the Lord. Still another tries to bring a soul to Christ, but Satan seems to hold that soul still more firmly in his shackles. What is to be done? We must not yield to depression but rather pour out our supplications before God as the Psalmist did — and then rely on His grace. He will not fail to reveal Himself still more to the soul that seeks after Him, and He will carry the matter

to its conclusion. At the beginning of Genesis, God had revealed Himself as the Creator: Elohim — Deity in the absolute. With the patriarchs He had assumed essentially the name of the Almighty — the one who meets all the needs of those who are pilgrims of faith and strangers on the earth. To Moses at this decisive hour, God reveals Himself as the Eternal God (Jehovah, or Yahweh) — the God of the covenant who looks after His people; the God who does not change and who acts in time according to what He is in Himself and not according to the merits of those favored ones on whose behalf He is operating (Exodus 6:2-8).

Having regained confidence in his mission, Moses goes back to the children of Israel, but they do not listen to him because of their heavy bondage. The Lord does not wait for another entreaty from His servant. He immediately strengthens his faith and orders him to go in and speak again to the king. Moses objects again: “The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?” The Lord then gives Moses and Aaron commandments for the children of Israel, and for Pharaoh that he might let the people go out of Egypt (Exodus 6:10-13; Exodus 7:1-5).

Moses and Aaron, fully confident in God’s promises (for they “persevered, as seeing Him who is invisible”) go to the king. They acquire increasing boldness and authority during the entire time of the plagues upon Egypt, being strengthened in faith through the display of their God’s power. Moses increasingly gains the upper hand, being fully aware that he speaks in the name of the Lord who spreads out “his strong hand and his outstretched arm” in favor of His people.

## 2. WHO ARE THEY THAT SHALL GO?

(Exodus 8:25-28; Exodus 10:8-11; Exodus 10:24-26)

There are signs for the people of God, and plagues for the Egyptians as the judgments of God come down upon the land. Seven times Pharaoh hardens his heart (look it up for yourself), and seven times the Lord hardens the heart of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh begins to yield a little, however, so that the Lord might withdraw the poisonous dog-flies from the land, and proposes to Moses that they go and sacrifice to their God “in the land.” Immediately Moses answers: “It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God ... We will go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He will command us” (Exodus 8:26-27). This illustrates the first snare of Satan — that those who worship God do so in the world and as mixed with the world. How successful Satan has been in bringing about such a condition in Christendom: In many Christian congregations, probably in the most important ones, believers and unbelievers mix together in the same “religious service.” As to the leaders, some of them no longer have faith in the Word of God or in the redeeming work of the cross. In order to worship truly, a definite separation is necessary. There must be “the three days’ journey into the wilderness” — a picture of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Pharaoh, harassed by the successive judgments which ravage his country, later yields still more. He calls Moses and Aaron and precisely asks the following question: “Who are they that shall go?”

Moses answers: “We will go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go” (Exodus 10:8-9).

This, however, is not the way in which Pharaoh understands it, and again he sets a new snare before the servants of God: "Go now, you who are men, and serve the LORD." In some countries today young people can attend a Christian meeting only from the age of eighteen; in other countries one can present the gospel only to those over twenty-one. Even among Christians in countries which enjoy liberty, the enemy strenuously endeavors to induce parents not to take their children with them to the meetings; or he persuades them to think that attending Sunday School or other special meetings for the young is too taxing for them! The enemy's tactics have not changed. He knows very well that youth is the favorable age to turn to the Lord, for then the entire life becomes oriented toward Him to be lived for Him.

Nehemiah 12:43 describes a day of worship and rejoicing when all the people — not only the men but also the women and the children — were happy to be gathered in the presence of the Lord. When on the other hand, it was a question of listening to the reading of the law, Ezra spoke "before the congregation, of men and women and all who could hear with understanding" (Nehemiah 8:2). Does this not teach us that we should all come to the worship meeting, including our children as soon as they are old enough to remain quiet? The oft-cited excuses about household chores and schoolwork should not prevent this. As for the meeting for Bible study where the Word of God is explained and studied, do not the Scriptures instruct us to bring along "all who could hear with understanding"? (Here understanding refers to natural intelligence, not the renewed intelligence which can exist only through conversion). In the face of Moses' categorical refusal of his offer, and in order to avoid a further judgment of three days of darkness, Pharaoh devises still another solution. He says: "Go, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you" (Exodus 10:24). Moses, however, knows very well that if the flocks and herds are left behind, the heart of the people will be drawn back again to Egypt. Hence he answers: "You must also give us sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. Our livestock also shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind."

Let us be careful to keep our hearts from clinging unduly to the material possessions which God has entrusted to us. They could become a hindrance to the worship which the Lord expects from us. As Luke 16:1-31 teaches, the "unrighteous mammon" is entrusted to our management, but our hearts should not become attached to it as a treasure. It must always remain at the Lord's disposal to be used according to His will.

Because Moses himself had earlier refused the riches of Egypt and chosen the reproach of Christ, he now had all the more authority to urge the people to place everything that they had at the Lord's disposal.

3. The Passover (Exodus 12:1-28; Hebrews 11:28) The Epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes that Moses celebrated the Passover "by faith." His parent's faith had been necessary to first hide him and then expose him on the river. Then at forty years old, his own faith was manifested through the choice that he made. Again he displayed this faith in "holding fast" in Egypt, despite the king's anger.

Why was faith necessary for the Passover? Pharaoh had nothing to do with it. At this point it is not faith acting in the presence of the enemy or under difficult circumstances, but it is still the same faith. It was not the enemy but God that was to be faced in judgment. During the nine preceding plagues the people had remained spectators, and beginning with the fourth plague had actually

been protected in the land of Goshen. But now the people must act — and this in accordance with the Word of the Lord to Moses. Faith was required as to what God had said. The people were just as guilty as the Egyptians, and even more so because their responsibility was greater. As other portions of Scripture reveal, they had indulged in idolatry in spite of some knowledge of the Lord; and in a considerable measure they had abandoned their God. If the destroying angel must pass through the land and kill all the firstborn, why should he spare the Israelites? After all, God's justice acts without respect of persons.

Only the blood of a spotless victim — a type of One who would come later — was able to shelter the people from the judgment. The Lord reveals this to Moses and Aaron (Exodus 12:1-20), who in turn instruct the elders of Israel. Moses' faith is an inspiring example: "The people bowed their heads and worshiped ... and did as the Lord had commanded" (vv. 27, 28).

Abel's sacrifice demonstrates that the blood of atonement was necessary to come near to God. Genesis 22:1-24 presents the thought of substitution: Abraham offered a ram as a sacrifice instead of his son. The offerings of Leviticus, through the placing of the offerer's hand on the head of the victim, express the identification of the one approaching with the sacrifice. (In the sacrifice for sin, the offences of the guilty one pass onto the victim, whereas in the burnt-offering the merits of the victim are credited to the worshipper.) In the Passover, the individual appropriation of the sacrifice is perfectly stressed: "Every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household" (Exodus 12:3). Moses did not offer one lamb for the entire people; each family had to slaughter a victim, the blood of which was to shelter them. So it is in the gospel. Jesus is "the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The value of His work in the sight of God enables God to offer His forgiveness to the whole world.

Other passages show just as clearly, however, that whereas the value of the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for the whole world, only those who accept it through faith are made beneficiaries of His work. In Romans 3:1-31 the righteousness of God is manifested "toward all, and upon all those who believe." Only those who believe are justified "through faith in His blood." Likewise John 3:16 teaches that God loved the world, but only those who believe in the Lord Jesus have life eternal. John 1:12 says that those who receive Him are given the right to be called children of God. Romans 10:9 says that "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." It is a matter of personally and individually accepting and confessing the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

According to the Passover instructions, the blood of the lamb is put on the two outside doorposts and on the lintel of each house. The family gathered inside the house eats the Passover lamb with the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs. The family does not see the blood and assess its value but the Lord does. He declares categorically: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you" (Exodus 12:13). Likewise, the repenting sinner who comes to the Lord Jesus is unable to assess the value of His blood; God alone does that. It is because of this blood He forgives and receives. The one who receives the Word of God as being true finds his certainty in the declarations of God's Word. He cannot explain it, but he knows that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). THE PASSOVER NIGHT

(Exodus 12:42) For Israel, the months began with each new moon; they were lunar months. Since the Passover took place on the fourteenth day of the month, the Israelites went out of Egypt on the full moon. In the evening they ate the lamb; their loins were girded; they were ready to leave. “At midnight ... the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt ... So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead” (Exodus 12:29-30).

One can understand the bewilderment of the Egyptians, each one rushing out of his house and telling the sad news to his neighbor; and then hearing his neighbor reporting the same calamity. With Pharaoh at their head the Egyptians drive Israel out of the land. The people, according to the instructions of the Lord to Moses (Exodus 11:2-3) ask from the Egyptians silver and gold, a well-deserved compensation for all their years of hard work and bondage.

Throughout the night, from various parts of the land of Goshen, the columns get under way “according to their hosts.” Their immediate goal is to reach Rameses and Succoth. Six hundred thousand men on foot with their families, plus a mixed multitude that went up with them — from two to three million souls, beside all the cattle that accompany them.

What a moment for Moses! When he was forty years old, he had wanted to give his brethren “deliverance through his hand” and now the time has arrived. After the tension caused by the successive plagues and the drama of this eventful night, a new life was to begin. The Lord had displayed His power and fulfilled His promise. No doubt a feeling of deep gratitude was arising in the heart of His servant. Considering the problems which would soon assail him, what responsibility rested upon him! He had to lead this great multitude through the wilderness — a desert which he knew by experience — up to the promised land. The immense task that God had entrusted to him was just beginning.

#### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Describe some of the discouragements and trials Moses faced as he went back to Egypt and talked with his brethren and with Pharaoh. Why did God allow these?
2. How does God deliver Moses and Aaron from their discouragements? What is the best way for us to get deliverance from our discouragements?
3. How would you apply to your own life the four compromises proposed by Pharaoh to Moses?
4. How did the passover differ from all the other plagues upon the land of Egypt? Does the passover have a personal application to your life?
5. Suppose yourself to be a firstborn son of an Israelite on the passover night. Describe in your own words the dramatic events of that night.

## 1.3. Chapter 03 - First Steps in the Wilderness - The Shepherd

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### Chapter 03 First Steps in the Wilderness — The Shepherd

Psalms 77:20 The last verse of Psalms 77:1-20 reads: “You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” Certainly, during the crossing of the Red Sea and through the wilderness Moses assumes this character of a shepherd. The psalm further emphasizes: “Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known” (v. 19). Such was the experience of the people. For them, the way of God was incomprehensible. It took them through deep waters — not only those of the Red Sea, but those of the successive tribulations which were intended to test their faith. The psalmist, however, adds: “Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary...” (v. 13). What God intends for His own is indeed constantly before Him and is perfectly made known by His wisdom and love, even when it seems to them to lead them through deep waters.

1. DELIVERANCE AT THE RED SEA (Read Hebrews 11:29; Exodus 13:17-22; Exodus 14:1-31)  
From the starting point of Rameses and Succoth the people had reached Etham at the edge of the wilderness. Normally the shortest route would have passed northwards through the land of the Philistines. God, however, was not willing that His people should face war during their first steps in the wilderness. He rather chose to lead them by His own path to Sinai. But first the pillar of cloud led them to pitch their camp at a place as unsuitable as possible from the standpoint of safety. It hemmed them in between the mountain and the sea, leaving no exit except the way they had just come.

After a few hours, this sole exit was occupied by Pharaoh and his host: “...the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them” (Exodus 14:10). Will Moses now lose the marvelous deliverance that God had wrought through his hand? He is not worried. Rather he stands fast by faith as seeing Him who is invisible. The people, however, are not entertaining the same feelings. A great fear fills them and they cry out to the Lord. In their hearts they reproach Moses and rebel (Psalms 106:7). Panic-stricken they exclaim, “it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness!” This produced the first crisis in the relationship between Moses and Israel. It would be followed by many others. Assured of the deliverance of the Lord, Moses inspires the people with his faith: “The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.” The enemy, however, does not let people escape easily. Even today when one has placed his trust in the blood of Christ for forgiveness of sin, Satan tries to instill in that person doubt, unbelief, and uncertainty about salvation. His aim is to fill us with affliction and doubts instead of with joy in our Lord’s accomplished deliverance.

Only the Word of God can give certainty as to salvation. Redemption is secured through the work of Christ. Since He performed the work that was required, we need not worry. The certainty of our salvation derives, through faith, from the declarations of the Word of God. We are called to behold “the salvation of the LORD” and to stand still, resting fully on the many passages of the word such as Romans 8:1 : “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” and

John 3:36 : “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life.”

Still another effort of the enemy is to keep those who are saved in the “world system” and under its grip. How many Christians, although washed in the blood of Christ, remain morally wrapped up in the world — in Egypt? They actually comply with Pharaoh’s injunction: “Sacrifice to the Lord your God in the land.”

God, however, wants to have His own truly for Himself. So at night He opened a pathway for Israel through the stormy sea. The people “went through the midst of the sea on the dry ground; and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” Hebrews 11:29 states very precisely: “By faith they passed through the Red Sea.” In this incident, faith characterized the people as a whole, whereas the earlier accounts in Hebrews 11:1-40 emphasize only Moses’ faith. It was no trifling matter for them to start walking between those two walls of water which at any moment could cover them. It required trust in the word of the Lord through Moses.

“Toward the morning” the Lord threw the army of the Egyptians into confusion. As dawn broke, the sea resumed its strength, engulfing the enemy in its midst. “Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt ... and believed the LORD and His servant Moses.” On the shore of the Red Sea a song of praise arises, sung by every one of the children of Israel. It is the first song in the Bible.

Only the redeemed, conscious of their deliverance, can sing. The psalmist and the prophets will never cease celebrating this memorable event. Indeed, the song of the redeemed which arose from thousands of hearts in Exodus, resounds on up to the the book of Revelation. The song exalts the slaughtered Lamb, the One who is the eternal center of praises for all His own.

## 2. BITTERNESS AT MARAH (Read Exodus 15:22-26)

Moses was acquainted with the wilderness — its aridity, heat and vastness (Exodus 3:1). What responsibility faced him there! He must lead an entire people with their flocks and herds through that wilderness. As for the people, their new-found faith is about to be put to the test. The same thing frequently happens in the life of new Christians. After a brief period, God allows trials to arise in order to demonstrate whether our faith is real; and whether we will or will not trust in Him.

One day, two days, three days are spent in the wilderness, and no water is found. Finally arriving at Marah, they “could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter.” The people murmur against Moses and he cries to the Lord. “And the LORD showed him a tree; and when he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet.” In the types used in the books of Moses, wood usually speaks of the humanity of the Lord Jesus — that perfect humanity in which He always did the will of God, even up to the supreme moment of Gethsemane where He was able to say: “Not as I will, but as You will.”

If trials arise in our lives, the first lesson to be learned is to accept them as coming from God. In the path of faith, we must submit to His will, knowing that He wants what is good for us. We must try to understand the special lesson taught by the difficulties thus encountered. For example, someone has applied for a position and is refused. A young father devotes himself entirely to supporting his family and furnishing his new home, but sickness stops him. A longed-for invitation fails to arrive. Someone is disappointed by the friend on whom he relied. Faith rises above

bitterness and disappointment, finding in the perfect sympathy of the Lord Jesus, the strength to accept as from God's hand the trials of the way that are so bitter. At Marah, the Lord reveals Himself by a new name: "the Lord who heals you." The waters become sweet. The healing of the Lord restores. Their next stopping point, Elim, illustrates refreshment and necessary food. And after that comes the manna, provided each morning for the needs of the people. What a marvelous experience!

3. THE LESSONS OF REPHIDIM (Read Exodus 17:1-16) The purpose of this book is to understand what the Word of God says to us about Moses: his personality, his training, and his instruction in the path of God. Therefore, we cannot go into all the details of the wilderness and are omitting, among other, the chapter about the manna. So far, everything has succeeded for Moses. Insolent and haughty Pharaoh has been overthrown. The Red Sea has been opened. The manna has met the requirements of the people. For the servant of God, however, it was necessary to further learn his helplessness again and again, and he learns this at Rephidim. THE ROCK (verses 1 to 7) At Rephidim there was no water. The people disputed with Moses and even spoke of stoning him. they said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" Pharaoh had wanted to hold back the children and the cattle in Egypt, and now the people reproach Moses with having brought them out from there.

Entirely powerless before this unjust contention, Moses cries out to the Lord and says: "What shall I do with this people?" Now he will learn a new lesson — the very presence of God suffices for all the needs of His own. God says, "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock." In 1 Corinthians 10:4 we read: "The rock was Christ." The rock must be struck by the rod of Moses, the rod of authority and judgment, so that the waters — a picture of the Holy Spirit — might flow in abundance (John 7:39).

Since Moses was personally attacked, he must now be personally honored. It is as He continues with dignity before the people in the presence of the elders of Israel that the water comes out of the rock for all to drink (v. 6).

AMALEK (verses 8 to 16)

Another obstacle arises during the march through the wilderness — Amalek. As a type of the flesh in us, Amalek attacks and harasses the people in the wilderness, especially the stragglers and the weak. There is the necessity to fight, but how? This situation presents another new lesson for Moses. Joshua, a type of the risen Lord and of the Holy Spirit, is placed at the head of the people as they go out to battle. This is an illustration of Galatians 5:17, "The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh."

It is not enough, however, for Joshua to fight. Moses must go up to the top of the hill with the rod of God in his hand and intercede for the people. There he is not precisely a type of Christ, but of those who come near to God through Him to intercede either for themselves or for His redeemed ones.

Moses is aware of his own weakness: "And so it was when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." But Moses' hands become tired. Is it not the same with us? Even if we have understood that the sole remedy for our infirmity is to persevere in prayer, we often are slack and lack constancy! Aaron and Hur come near and support

the hands of Moses. Here Aaron is a type of Christ as Priest, “always living to intercede” for His own. In his youth Moses wanted to fight: he killed the Egyptian. Now well on in years, he joins his brother and his companion in praying for the people of God. The presence of God and the prayer of intercession — such were for Moses the great lessons of Rephidim.

#### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Explain why God so quickly led the people to a spot where they were entrapped between the mountains, the Red Sea and the pursuing Egyptian army.
2. How does the pursuing Egyptian army illustrate the efforts of Satan against those who are newly redeemed by the blood of Christ? How should we respond to his efforts?
3. Can you think of an incident in your life similar to the Israelites' experience at Marah where the waters were bitter? How did the Lord make the bitter waters sweet and give healing in the situation?
4. Again and again, the problem facing the Israelites in the desert was lack of water. Why didn't God give them an abundant and visible supply? For example, what lesson did the Lord wish to teach Moses and the people at Rephidim?
5. What do you learn about prayer through Israel's battle with the Amalekites? Try to think of at least two practical ways in which you might improve your prayer life.

## 1.4. Chapter 04 - AT SINAI - THE MEDIATOR

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Chapter 04 AT SINAI — THE MEDIATOR (The first year) In the first month after their departure out of the land of Egypt, the children of Israel come into the wilderness of Sinai (Exodus 19:1). Through Moses, the Lord gives them these remarkable words: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (v. 4). The unruly multitude that had gone out of Goshen was about to be formed into a nation (v. 6), complete with laws, worship, a center and a well-ordered army. The first year of the exodus begins with the Passover and the Red Sea, and continues with God’s care in the wilderness: the manna, the water from the rock, and the victory over Amalek. Then at Sinai the people receive the law and the statutes. In its moral application to us, this first year refers essentially to our individual life: remission of sin, redemption, personal feeding of our souls, and our personal walk with the Lord. The second year (Exodus 40:1-17) starts with the erection of the tabernacle. It continues with the consecration of the priests, the offerings of the princes, the institution of the rituals, the arrangement of the camp, and the march in the wilderness. In contrast to the first year, it emphasizes the collective life of the people. So it is with us. As believers we have not been redeemed to live and walk alone, but rather to be found in the company of his brethren. Christ died to “gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.”

Already during the second year the people could have undertaken the conquest of Canaan, had they not lacked faith at Kadesh-barnea after receiving the report of the spies. In this sense, the additional thirty-eight years spent in the wilderness were not necessary at all; but Israel had to learn to know itself and to know God (Deuteronomy 8:1-20).

### 1. RECEIVING THE LAW — THE LAWGIVER

Confronted with the majestic display of God’s holiness, the people tremble (Exodus 19:16). Moses himself (as Hebrews 12:21 reminds us) was so fearful of the sight that he said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.” Then God pronounces the ten basic commandments on which the moral law is founded. The people are frightened and stand afar off. They say to Moses: “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” They remain at a distance, but “Moses drew near.” On another occasion, seventy of the elders of Israel go up with Moses to the mountain, along with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu; but Moses alone comes near to the Lord while the others stand back. As for the people, they must not even touch the mountain, much less go up with them. The sole information given about the vision of God as seen by the elders is that “there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity” (Exodus 24:10).

Finally, Moses goes up on the mountain and hears the divine communications. He spends six days on mount Sinai in the company of Joshua. On the seventh day Moses alone enters into the cloud and remains in the presence of God forty days and forty nights. At that time He receives the two tables, the statutes, and the instructions relative to the tabernacle. On three occasions when Moses relates to the people the words of God, they answer: “All that the Lord has spoken will we

do!" (Exodus 19:8; Exodus 24:3; Exodus 24:7). In no way, however, would they be able to keep the law. As Galatians 3:21 says, "if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law." By committing themselves with this rash promise to keep God's commandments, the people revealed that they really knew neither God nor themselves. Someone will ask, "Why then was the law given?" This question is answered by the apostle Paul in Galatians and Romans: "I would not have known sin except through the law." A child might easily promise to behave well and always obey his parents. God, however, will allow definite situations in which the child will find himself at fault so that his conscience might be reached. Would there be any real conversion without at least some measure of the conviction of sin? Some realization of one's own ruin? Some impression of the holiness of God? When young Isaiah entered the temple, he exclaimed: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). Peter, sensible of the honor done to him, received Jesus into his boat; but after launching out into the deep and witnessing the miraculous "haul of fishes which they had taken" he understood that his passenger in the ship was God Himself. Then he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8).

Likewise, we must place ourselves before the ten commandments and seriously examine whether we have observed each one of them. It is not enough to have refrained from stealing. The mere wish to steal is a transgression of the tenth commandment! Which young man can say that the lust mentioned in Matthew 5:28 never arose in his heart? Are there many people who have never said "fool" to a brother or friend? (Matthew 5:22). When suddenly convicted by the Word, one of our young friends stated that he deserved hell since he had treated his brother in this way more than once. What should be said in answer to his confession? Something like: "That was not so serious. Your brother got on your nerves, and you got angry with him?" Certainly not! Every sin is serious according to the Word of God. The Lord Jesus condemns even slight anger at one's brother. Therefore each one of us deserves hell! Of course. our young friend was trembling at this thought. At such a point, how marvelous it is to present the work of the Lord Jesus. He atoned for our sins, bearing them in His body on the cross. The chastisement that we deserve fell on Him. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13).

2. THE CRISIS OF THE GOLDEN CALF (Exodus 32:1-35) In making the golden calf, Aaron and the people did not really want to abandon the Lord. They rather transgressed the second commandment: "You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; You shall not bow down to them nor serve them" (Exodus 20:4-5). The human spirit always tends to materialize what is spiritual. It must have a visible form, an object that can be at least revered, if not worshiped. This was Aaron's problem. As he saw the golden calf, "he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD" (Exodus 32:5). In their thoughts, Aaron and the people lowered the Lord to the level of the gods of Egypt, saying, "Here is your God."

Idolatry always brings man down and leads him to disorder (v. 25), orgies and licentiousness (v. 6). Romans one shows this convincingly. Nothing is more serious than to associate the name of the Lord with idolatry.

What will be Moses' attitude in this situation?

(A) On the top of the mountain, the Lord informs Moses of what has taken place (v. 7-10). Putting him to the test, He proposes to consume the people and then make a great nation out of Moses. What an opportunity for him to be carried away by anger, and to accept this divine proposal! After all, the people have murmured so many times against him.

However, he has the interests of his God too much at heart to act in this way. Instead, he immediately beseeches the Lord, setting forth two decisive arguments for sparing Israel: (1) What would the Egyptians say if the people of Israel were annihilated from the face of the earth? They would boast, saying that God is powerless. (2) The Lord had promised positively to the patriarchs that He would multiply their seed and give to them the land of Canaan. What would become of the fulfillment of this solemn promise? Is it not the same in our intercession for our brethren? On the one hand, we must remember the faithfulness of God, his promises, his righteousness toward Christ ("He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins"). On the other hand, we must think of the testimony which Christians bear before the world: "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life" (1 John 5:16).

(B) When Moses sees the calf and the dancing (v. 19), his anger burns and he shatters the tables of the law. This was righteous anger and not an outburst of carnal feelings. Scarcely had the law been given, and it was already transgressed. He takes the calf, grinds it to powder, scatters it on the water, and makes the children of Israel drink it. They must realize the gravity of their sin.

Likewise, if we have gravely failed, we must acknowledge it and confess it before God; but we must also feel deeply in our souls how serious sin is and how abominable it is to God.

Moses entrusts to the Levites the terrible mission of exterminating those who apparently had plunged more deeply into idolatry. Even their brethren, their neighbors, or their intimate friends must not be spared. Three thousand men thus perish. This stands in contrast to the introduction of grace on the day of Pentecost some 1500 years later. As the gospel is preached on that first day of a new dispensation, three thousand souls are brought to the Lord (Acts 2:1-47).

(C) By the next day, the tumult and anger have subsided. Will Moses now say: "Yesterday I became angry, but the evil was not so serious?" On the contrary, he speaks again with deep feeling: "You have sinned a great sin." Having pondered the matter in his innermost heart, he goes up again to the Lord, declaring, "Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin" (v. 30). He does not reveal what means he will use to do this, nor is he even sure that this means will succeed.

Bowed down with grief before the Lord, Moses acknowledges that the people have committed a grave sin. He adds: "Yet now, if You will forgive their sin ..." He is not able to finish his sentence for he knows well that God cannot forgive without atonement being made. Hence he expresses what he has secretly conceived in his heart: "If not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." He thus offers himself as a propitiation for the people. He has not yet learned what the psalmist will declare later: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psalms 49:7). And yet, the Lord forgives. However, He cannot accept that Moses should suffer for the people: "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot him out of my book." If the Lord seems to bear with sin, it is because He has before Him the future coming of Another One who will offer Himself in sacrifice for sin. Through Christ, He will set forth a mercy-seat, so that He

might be just, and the Justifier of the one that has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:24-26). It was possible for God to endure in absolute righteousness “the sins that were previously committed” (that is, those committed during the entire period of the Old Testament) because He had before Him the perfect Victim who would be manifested in His own time.

Thus God will be just and He will also forgive. He will be faithful to His promises (Exodus 33:1) while also maintaining His glory as to the Egyptians. In His “government” however, He will have to chastise His own; He withdraws His presence from their midst (Exodus 33:3).

### 3. THE TENT OF MEETING — THE INTERCESSOR (Exodus 33:7-11)

After the sin of the people God departs, saying “I will send My Angel before you” (Exodus 33:2-3). Upon hearing this disturbing word, the people mourn and strip themselves of their ornaments.

What is to be done under these circumstances? The camp had been abandoned to confusion. The presence of God was withdrawn. Moses, however, had already received on the mountain the instructions to build the tabernacle; the habitation of God was to occupy the central place and the tribes were to camp all around it.

Since the people are in utter confusion, Moses realizes that it is no longer possible for God to dwell among them. Will it then be necessary to renounce every manifestation of the divine presence for those who fear the Lord? Moses takes a tent and pitches it for himself outside the Camp, far from the camp, and calls it the tabernacle of meeting. “And it came to pass that every one who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting.” So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle” (vv. 7, 8).

Thus there were two categories of persons: those who were seeking the Lord and went out of their tents; and the others who only looked afar off from the entrance of their own tents. Do we not have a similar instruction in Hebrews 13:1-25 : “Let us go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach”? Christendom, because of its confusion and errors, resembles in many ways the camp of Israel. Like the godly Israelites who went out to Moses, it is possible for us today to go forth out of the camp; and in recognition of 2 Timothy 2:19-22, to meet simply to the name of the Lord Jesus. We can do this with full confidence in His promise of Matthew 18:20 : “Where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there I am in the midst of them.” Since everyone does not obey the Lord’s commandment, only a “remnant” gathers around Him; but this remnant can fully rely on the promise of His presence.

“And it came to pass, when Moses went out to the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the entrance of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses.” The entire people could recognize that the presence of the Lord was manifested there, and no longer in the midst of the camp. In that outside place Moses, the faithful servant, could find a communion which he had never known before. The Lord speaks with him “face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.”

Moses then intercedes for the people on the principle of grace, a new principle at this point. Being aware of himself as the object of God’s favor, he beseeches the Lord to extend His grace to the entire people. He receives the marvelous answer: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” This, however, was not enough to satisfy Moses. Since he had found grace in the eyes

of the Lord, he intercedes that God might go with the people as well as with himself. Finally the Lord yields to his prayer: "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight" (Exodus 33:17). The Vision Of Grace

Moses, deeply encouraged by this intimate relationship with his God, fervently prays to see the glory of His face. However, the moment has not yet arrived for the knowledge of the glory of God to shine in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). Therefore, the Lord must say to His servant: "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see Me, and live." Although the Lord cannot yet reveal His glory, He declares: "I will make all My goodness pass before you."

Thus placed in the cleft of the rock and alone in the sanctuary of God's presence, Moses receives a new revelation of God whom he has so faithfully followed until now. At the bush, he had learned to know Him as the one who does not change: "I am that I am." In Egypt, God revealed Himself to him as "The Lord, the God of the covenant." At Sinai, he received the law from "the righteous and holy God." In the cleft of the rock, however, he learns to know the very nature of the One who is love: "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6-7).

Later, in the secret of the temple, young Isaiah will learn to know the grace which takes away his iniquity and makes propitiation for his sin. In the vision at Horeb, Elijah will hear the soft and gentle voice which will touch his heart. In the temple at Jerusalem, Paul will see the One who sends him to the nations far off. And alone in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea and flooded with the light of the resurrection morning, Mary of Magdala will fall at the feet of her risen Savior.

One may well understand that after coming down from the mountain, Moses is no longer the same. He now has in his hands the tables of the law. They are not shattered this time, but placed intact into the ark, a type of Christ. He no longer comes chastising the culprits and spreading terror in the camp. The skin of his face shines, reflecting the goodness and grace of which he had caught a glimpse. He had "spoken with Him." Aaron and the people, afraid at first, come near to him and Moses puts a veil on his face. The time had not yet come for the glory of grace to be fully revealed. Even today the veil remains on the hearts of the people of Israel (2 Corinthians 3:15).

However, God has shone forth the knowledge of His glory in the face of Christ. All of us who know the Lord Jesus can contemplate with unveiled face this glory of the Lord. We can be transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). Have we not noticed the details of this remarkable verse? "We all . . . are transformed?" It is not now as it was with Moses the privilege of one particular man or the prerogative of some eminent servant. This marvelous vision is there for all. There is no longer any veil . . .but one must have the time and a heart to contemplate it.

#### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Explain how Israel's first year in the wilderness illustrates the individual Christian life; and how their second year illustrates the collective Christian life.
2. Pick out one feature from the giving of the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai which especially impresses you. Tell why it impresses you.

3. What was God's purpose in giving the ten commandments?
4. How does the Golden Calf incident illustrate the meaning and results of idolatry? Is it possible for a true believer to be guilty of idolatry? Explain your answer.
5. Describe Moses' reaction to the Golden Calf incident. Note his intercession, his righteous indignation, his decisive judgment on the people, his self-sacrificing concern for them. What is your response when other Christians sin and publicly dishonor the Name of the Lord?
6. What practical lessons do you learn from Moses' pitching the tent of meeting outside the camp? What were the two opposite responses of the people to his action?
7. Review the various ways in which God revealed Himself to Moses: at the burning bush, in Egypt, at Sinai, and in the cleft of the rock. How did these revelations change Moses? What revelations have we had from God's Word that have changed our lives?

## 1.5. Chapter 05 - FROM SINAI TO KADESH

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Chapter 05 FROM SINAI TO KADESH (The Second year) On the first day of the first month of the second year after the children of Israel had left Egypt, the tabernacle was set up (Exodus 40:2). Different events occurred one after the other: the consecration of the priests, the offering of the princes, the celebration of the Passover. On the first day of the second month Moses proceeds to number the men “that go forth to military service” (Numbers 1:3).

Finally, on the twentieth day of the second month of this second year, the cloud over the tabernacle begins to move. The children of Israel leave the wilderness of Sinai, for the first time following the commandment of the Lord about journeying. Six tribes preceded the ark and the sanctuary, and six tribes formed the rear-guard.

### 1. EYES IN THE WILDERNESS (Numbers 10:29-36)

Fundamentally the cloud directed the movements of the people (Numbers 9:15-23). When the children of Israel were to strike camp, the priests blew the trumpets (Numbers 10:1-8). The Lord had provided everything, and His presence accompanied Israel.

Why does Moses wish for some human help in the person of his brother-in-law, Hobab? Being a Midianite, he would, of course, be well acquainted with the wilderness and the places where to encamp. It can further be said that Moses seemed to have his welfare in mind, insisting on letting him share in “whatever good the Lord will do to us.”

Actually, Hobab will not precede the people and find the place to encamp. The ark itself, proceeding out of its normal place in the midst of the tribes, will go before them “in the three days’ journey” to search out a resting place for them! The movement of the cloud ratifies that they are to move, thus manifesting the divine presence. This is God’s gracious answer to the persevering intercession of Moses, despite the lack of confidence in God which he displayed in asking for Hobab’s assistance. Is it not the same with us? In John 10:1-42 the Good Shepherd puts forth His own sheep and “he goes before them.” The sheep follow Him, because they know His voice. This precious experience of knowing that “He goes before” can be made at any age.

If you are facing an unknown stage in your life: a new period of studies, a sojourn abroad, another course of professional training, remember that “He goes before.” Trust Him and rely on Him. The ark leaves three days in advance so there is no need to hurry. It is enough to quietly follow the way He opens. “Whoever believes will not act hastily” (Isaiah 28:16). May we avail ourselves of the promise made to the psalmist: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye” (Psalms 32:8). We get this instruction from the word of God, applied in practical fellowship with the Lord.

### 2. THE BURDEN OF ALL THIS PEOPLE Numbers 11:10-17; Numbers 24:1-25; Numbers 25:1-18; Numbers 26:1-65; Numbers 27:1-23; Numbers 28:1-31; Numbers 29:1-40)

Numbers is the wilderness book; it is also the book of complaints. How many times the Israelites complain, weep and wail! In our chapter “the people complained...the people cried out to Moses ...the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again...Moses heard the people weeping...every one at the door of his tent.”

One can understand how these constant complaints (which brought on Israel the chastisement of the Lord) could overtax the patience of their leader. So Moses pours out his complaint before God: “Why?...Why?...they weep all over me...I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me.”

Exodus 18:1-27 tells how Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, advised him to obtain some help in administering justice by providing able men: chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. His counsel was that these men judge the people at all times and bring only the great matters to their chief. On the one hand, Moses would “stand before God for the people, so that (he might) bring the difficulties to God.” And on the other hand he would teach them the statutes and the laws. Moses followed this advice, taking it as from God (Exodus 18:23). In Deuteronomy 1:9-18 he recalls the incident without adding any negative comment. A counterpart to this might be found in 1 Corinthians 6:4.

However, in Numbers 11:1-35 it was not a matter of dispensing justice or hearing problems. It was rather Moses’ feeling of being overwhelmed with the burden of his responsibilities. Certainly God was able to give Moses the means necessary to carry out his charge, and He had instructed him to lead Israel.

Today, in the light of the New Testament, one must acknowledge that it is not God's intention for His people that only one man assume responsibility for the entire service of the local assembly. The decision of Acts 15:1-41 was not reached by one apostle, however prominent, but by the apostles and the elders, with the concurrence of the whole assembly (v. 22). According to passages such as Php 4:3 and Colossians 4:11, Paul had several “fellow laborers” whom he sent here and there, or who accompanied him on his journeys.

Passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, Romans 12:1-21 and Ephesians 4:1-32 show that each member, every joint, has his/her particular service in the body of Christ; and that all work together for the advantage of the entire body. The Lord alone imparts through the Spirit various gifts, not only the fundamental ones of shepherd, evangelist or prophet, but also every kind of work and function to be performed in the body. All do not have the same qualification, but all the members must equally care for one another: “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

Hence, even if it was not proper for Moses to complain to God in this way, we can think that God answered him in grace by giving the seventy elders to assist him in carrying the burden of the people. And Moses did not take it in the wrong way. When Joshua wanted to prevent Eldad and Medad from prophesying in the camp, Moses replies: “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:29). Moses did not at all wish to be the sole channel of the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 12:21 reminds us that “the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’; nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ Each of us has received from the Lord a

service to perform, and we cannot abandon it to somebody else. Neither should we despise or try to imitate the function which God might have entrusted to others. All are called in dependence on the Lord, to be “joined in the work and laboring” (1 Corinthians 16:16 JND) in a spirit of submission and mutual esteem (Php 2:4; Romans 12:3). This is not collaboration as understood in a human organization. Rather, it is cooperation in a living organism, each member operating at the place assigned by the Master (Ephesians 4:16); and particularly today in the scope of 2 Timothy 2:19-26.

### 3. BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT AT KADESH (Deuteronomy 1:19-46; Numbers 13:1-33 and Numbers 14:1-45)

“It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea” (Deuteronomy 1:2). A few days would suffice to reach the frontier of Canaan. Yet, more than thirty eight years after the departure from Sinai we meet the people at Kadesh-barnea again (Numbers 20:1). So today, the spiritual progress of a soul can be rapid, but often many years are wasted through lack of faith, vigilance, and love for the Lord. This is just what happened with the people of Israel. As the starting point for the conquest, Kadesh-Barnea was situated at the frontier of Canaan. Moses mentions it in Deuteronomy one. After the “great and terrible wilderness” which they had crossed, the Israelites had only to move forward fearlessly and take possession of Palestine. As Moses said, “You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the LORD our God is giving us. Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the LORD God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged” (Deuteronomy 1:20-21). In these words one can sense all the relief felt by Moses. He had brought the people through the different stages of the wilderness up to the frontier of Canaan. Just a few more efforts, and through God’s kindness he would soon be able to lay down his heavy burden and enjoy rest.

Why then was the course of events different?

(A) The people conceived the blameable wish to send spies to examine the land. Was it not enough that God had declared to them that it was a country flowing with milk and honey, and that He would accompany them in their conquest of it? No, they want men to examine the land on their behalf and bring them news about it. Numbers 13:1-33 describes how the Lord accedes to their request and tells Moses to send out spies. In this way, He tries the people to see whether they will trust Him or not.

(B) The people wrongly accepted the majority report of the spies. True, these men reported that Canaan was as God had promised: “The land...truly flows with milk and honey” (Numbers 13:27). However, they quickly add that the people dwelling in the land are strong; the cities are walled and very great. They discredit the land and completely discourage the children of Israel from conquering it.

Caleb protests boldly: “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.” The following day, Joshua joins him, insisting that Israel must not “fear the people of the land, for...the LORD is with us” (Numbers 14:9). Will Israel listen to the disheartening declarations of the ten, or to the two men of faith who, trusting the Lord, assure them of the victory?

How is it with us? Are we among those who recommend “the land” or those who hold back souls from following the Lord? Are not criticisms, detractions, depreciation of the ministry of the Word, negligence in attending the meetings, and so many other insinuation elements which discourage

our brethren from possessing the spiritual blessings given by God? Let us, like Joshua and Caleb, rely on God to take possession of what He has given us, and incite others to do the same.

(C) The people listen to the ten spies. During the entire night they lift up their voice, crying and weeping. In the morning they reject Moses and prepare to appoint a captain who will lead them back to Egypt. They further declare that Joshua and Caleb should be stoned.

What a terrible hour for Moses! It may have been the darkest hour in his life. How many times had he not interceded for this people? He had even offered himself for them as a propitiation for their sin, if this had been possible. With faithfulness and constancy he had led them up to the frontier of the promised land. Now they reject him and want to return to Egypt. He falls on his face before the entire assembly, painfully aware that the promised rest is about to be forfeited. The Lord puts his servant to the test by again proposing that He destroy the people and make of Moses a nation greater and mightier than they. Moses, however, would not accept to enter the land alone, sacrificing his brethren and the glory of God (v. 16). He beseeches the Lord to forgive once more "according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people from Egypt even until now" (v. 19). "Then the LORD said: I have pardoned, according to your word."

Moses, however, will have to submit to the discipline that will strike Israel on account of their unbelief. The entire generation that came out of Egypt will perish in the wilderness. What a faithful servant is Moses! He accepts rather to be thirty-eight years in affliction along with the people of God than to witness their destruction and himself be honored. He bows down, submitting to the suffering which he has not deserved. He will see the bodies of his companions fall one after another and die in the arid solitude. As he sees it at this time, only four will survive the thirty-eight more years in the wilderness and enter the promised land: himself, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb.

Several of the people seem to reconsider: "And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, 'Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned!'" (Numbers 14:40). However, they are persisting in their own strength. Moses rather submits to the divine discipline and remains in the camp. Then, as he expresses with deep melancholy in Deuteronomy 2:1, "...we turned and journeyed into the wilderness of the Way of the Red Sea, as the LORD spoke to me."

Making all due allowance, do we not at times face the same experience? Must we not also humble ourselves and bow under the hand of God who disciplines His people, even if personally we have had no direct part in the fault that brings divine chastisement upon us?

#### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Describe the camp of Israel as they left the wilderness of Sinai. In what ways do you see God's concern for them, His desire to be among them and lead them?
2. How is the functioning of various members in the body of Christ illustrated by the distribution of Moses' responsibility among seventy of the elders of Israel? What is your place and function in the body of Christ?
3. What factors prevented the Israelites from going in to possess the promised land when they first arrived at the frontier town of Kadesh- Barnea? What was the result of their failure to possess the land at that time?

4. What are some of the ways in which we hinder one another from possessing our land of spiritual blessings in Christ?

5. How does Moses' great heart for God and for the people of God shine forth once again at Kadesh-barnea?

## 1.6. Chapter 06 - THIRTY-EIGHT MORE YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS

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Chapter 06 THIRTY-EIGHT MORE YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS In Deuteronomy 2:14-15 we read: “And the time we took to come from Kadesh-Barnea...was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp.” A choice had been made at Kadesh by these men; they did not have the faith to go up and conquer the land of Canaan, as Caleb and Joshua had urged them to do. Frightened by the enemy, they had renounced God’s desire for them to possess it.

Regarding salvation or the daily walk, there are decisive days in life when we too are confronted by a crossroads. Will we really decide for the Lord, adhering to Him and giving Him the first place? Or do we still want to enjoy the things of this world a little longer? The broad road will lead us far away from fellowship with the Lord. For the Israelites there was no return, no recovery. Under the government of God, the face of the wilderness was strewn with their graves.

We will not take time to consider the various incidents recorded in the Word which occurred during these long years. However, three of them may retain our attention as marking more particularly the character of Moses. These are: the criticism by Miriam, the rebellion of Korah, and the tension at Meribah.

### 1. MEEKNESS AND HUMILITY (A) In The Face Of Miriam’s Criticism (Numbers 12:1-16)\*

Miriam, the older sister of Moses, had come out with him from Egypt. She had led the choirs of the women in the song of triumph after the Crossing of the Red Sea, and had no doubt acquired an important position within the family and among the people because of her age (Micah 6:4).

Now however, Zipporah\*\* (who had left Moses for a time) reappears (Exodus 18:2). Now that Moses has a wife again, Miriam can no longer have the same place as before. As easily happens under such circumstances, Miriam starts to criticize her brother, speaking against him and belittling him. She wins Aaron over, and together they ask insinuatingly: “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” (Numbers 12:2).

How many times, even among us, do envy and jealousy cause criticism and slander? 1 Peter 2:1 teaches us that we must lay aside all envyings and jealousy if we want to be fed by the pure milk of the Word; if we want to come near the Lord and worship Him. The account in Numbers 12:1-16 emphasizes the seriousness of these faults.

Furthermore, Miriam and Aaron, blinded by their self-importance, refuse to acknowledge the place given by God to Moses. “And the Lord heard it” (Numbers 12:2). Someone may think that he has whispered a critical word only in the ear of a brother or sister, advising him or her not to tell it to anybody else. Let us remember that the Lord has heard it and will hold us accountable.

Moses probably knew the criticisms that Miriam was spreading against him. However, as the Word of God says, he was very meek, “more than all men who were on the face of earth.” Humbly he kept silent, just as his Master would do in a future day. When we become the objects of criticism or

even slander, should we not also leave it to God? He will bring everything to light at the right moment, and will not allow any bad effect beyond what He deems advisable for his servants.

“Suddenly” the Lord intervenes, calling Moses, Aaron and Miriam to the tent of meeting. Perhaps Aaron and Miriam imagine that what had just happened with the seventy elders will now take place with them. That is, the Lord will take of the Spirit which is on their younger brother and place it on them. If this is what they think, their eyes will soon be opened. The Lord summons Miriam and Aaron to appear alone before Him. Undertaking Moses’ defence, He says: “Why...were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?”

We may well underline this verse in our Bibles so that we might take care not to do the same. Criticisms against the servants of God, against their ministry, and against their behavior are so easily expressed!

“So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed. And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow.” She must suffer the consequences of her failure. Moses intercedes for her, a fresh proof of his love and humility; but the entire people will know the chastisement that has struck the prophetess who had not been afraid to criticize her brother. During seven days she is to be excluded from the camp; and Israel cannot journey until Miriam is healed and received back into the camp. Regretting a fault is not enough. We must feel deeply within ourselves its gravity in the eyes of God, if not in those of men.

Let us emphasize the attitude of Moses who prays and intercedes for his sister, just as Job did for his friends, and as John invites us to do if we see a brother sinning. Matthew 18:1-35 teaches us to go and see such a brother and try to win him. If this move although made in the humble spirit of footwashing as described in John 13:1-38 — remains fruitless, two or three brothers must be taken along in order to try to recover the guilty one. It is only after the second visit has failed that one must tell it to the assembly, and then only if the case is sufficiently serious. Evil must in no way be spread abroad. Let us not forget how much Miriam suffered for it.

#### (B) In The Face of Korah’s Rebellion

Numbers 16:1-50 relates the most serious difficulty faced by Moses during the forty years in the wilderness. Korah, a Levite of the family of the Kohathites, becomes puffed up. Rallying two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly to himself, he intends to seize religious power. He boldly asks, “Why is the priesthood reserved for the family of Aaron? Why do the Levites not have access to it? Since the entire assembly of Israel — all of them are holy and the Lord is in the midst of them, why do Moses and Aaron lift themselves up above the congregation of the Lord?”

It is not only in our days that an alleged zeal for the holiness of God’s assembly is used as a pretext to put oneself forward and to gain influence!

Dathan, Abiram and On of the tribe of Reuben also attack, so to say, the civil authority of Moses, saying, “Is it a small thing that you...should keep acting like a prince over us?” (v. 13). The double rebellion grows to the point of involving the whole assembly (v. 19). What will Moses do? As at so many other times, he falls on his face (whereas Korah exalts himself) and leaves the decision to God, saying, “Tomorrow morning the LORD will show ...whom He chooses” (v.5). On the one hand

Moses relies on the decision of God to confirm the position which He has given to each one; on the other hand he waits until "to-morrow." He does not want to act hastily in spite of the gravity of the situation. He would rather allow Korah and those with him enough time to repent. The ingratitude and rebellion experienced by Moses might have caused him to go away and leave the people to their fate. He stays however, aware of the responsibility involved in his God-given position. He keeps his position of authority without losing his spirit of grace and humility. Is this not the first lesson that we must learn from this chapter, that is, to acknowledge the position imparted by God to each one of his people? In the body of Christ the members do not all have the same function. God has placed each one in the body as it has pleased Him. None can say to the others: "We do not need you." Members who seem less important cannot think that they therefore do not belong to the body. The Levites, as Moses emphasized, occupied a privileged position. They could come near to God in performing the service of the tabernacle (v. 9). Why then should they also want to assume the priesthood for themselves? If God has entrusted it to the family of Aaron, should they not acknowledge this special position? And if God has invested Moses with authority, must not His decisions be obeyed with all submission?

Today it is not quite the same since all believers are priests. However, The Word of God does mark out some as elders and some as leaders to be obeyed. Those who labor in the Word must be highly esteemed in love. It is important for us to first discern the place of personal service which the Lord has entrusted to each of us. Then in dependence on Him, seek through His grace to faithfully fulfill that place without trying to encroach on the ground entrusted by the Lord to others.

Faced with the insolent attitude of Dathan and Abiram, Moses once more places himself in the hands of the Lord (v. 15). The day after, Korah gathers his two hundred fifty men. As they all offer incense together at the entrance of the tent of meeting, thus acting as priests, the Lord again threatens to destroy the entire people (v. 21). Moses, however, intercedes for them, and the Lord spares them on condition that they depart from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Because the case is so serious, God cannot show mercy. A simple exclusion from the assembly is no longer possible for these men. One must depart from them and leave them to their fate.

These men learn nothing from the situation. On the contrary, they stand in the entrance of their tents with their wives, their sons and their little ones, defying the entire assembly. Suddenly, the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up! Fire from the Lord also consumes the two hundred and fifty men who offered the incense. Thus the entire people must learn that only the intercession of Moses — a type of Christ — was able to keep them from perdition; They also must know that God's judgment does not spare the guilty ones who do not repent. As with the incident of the golden calf, order is not yet restored by the following day. The whole assembly again murmurs against Moses and Aaron, saying that they have killed the people of the Lord. A plague breaks out and would have destroyed them all, had not Aaron taken a censer upon Moses' instruction, and stood between the dead and the living. Thus, the plague is stayed. The incense speaks of an offering, the sweet odor of which would ascend before God. It is a perfect figure of the Victim who alone can save from eternal death those who trust in Him. This time 14,700 people die. This shows how serious it is to continue to rebel after God's judgment has been clearly declared.

God, however, wanted to confirm openly the priesthood of Aaron. Hence, He gives a sign to clearly designate the one whom He has chosen. It is not a sign of death like the fire which

consumed the two hundred fifty men, but a sign of life. The rod of Aaron, placed in the sanctuary together with the rods of the princes of the twelve tribes, alone buds forth, bearing flowers and fruit. Thus, Aaron is a type of that other Priest, "...Who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life" (Hebrews 7:16).

## 2. TENSION AT MERIBAH (Numbers 20:1-13)

It is now the fortieth year in the wilderness. Since the incident of the spies in the second year, the people have been roaming about and have finally gathered again at Kadesh. At this time, Miriam dies and is buried.

Once more there is no water. How will the new generation, raised in the wilderness, react? They know the law and the statutes, they have celebrated the Passover, and the tabernacle is dwelling in their midst. One may understand the murmurings of those brought up in Egypt, but the younger generation had heard the teaching of Moses. They were the object of his care. They saw the glory of the Lord so many times in the wilderness. Will they not behave better than their fathers? Not at all. The human heart remains the same and again murmurings, reproaches, and questions are raised, this time from the new generation. Moses and Aaron fall upon their faces, not before the congregation as on other occasions, but "at the entrance of the tent of meeting" (Numbers 20:6 JND). The glory of the Lord appears to them, this time not to consume the people but to use grace. Such grace would be shown on the basis of the priesthood, confirmed through the life manifested in the rod of Aaron. The Lord gives Moses precise instructions: he must take "...the rod from before the LORD" (Numbers 20:9) — the rod that had budded forth. He must gather the assembly together and speak before them to the rock. Moses takes the rod as the Lord had commanded him. The two brothers gather the congregation before the rock.

It is a moment of tension, irritation, and indignation for Moses whose career will be broken down through his ill-considered action on this occasion. He says to them: "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock? Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod." Had Moses' faith decreased? Had he become somewhat tired of the prolonged ingratitude of the people? Whatever the case might be, he lacks the faith that would enable him to simply speak to the rock. He wants to use authority in striking it with his rod. He thus disobeys the Lord's precise order to only speak to the rock while holding in his hand the rod of grace connected with the priesthood.

Grace alone was able to introduce the people into the land. Neither authority nor the rod of judgment could do so. The whole incident is a picture of Christ who would be offered only once. Even if Moses was unable to understand the entire import of his gesture, it still was a serious matter to strike the rock a second time.

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land' (v. 12). In our eyes, the divine sentence seems to be out of proportion to their fault. However, the Lord holds more responsible those who have received much, especially his servants (Luke 12:48).

Several times Moses beseeches God to revoke his sentence, but the divine decision remains inexorable (Deuteronomy 3:25-26). The old servant of God recovers communion and intimacy with the Lord, but under the divine government, the consequences remain: "You shall not go over this

Jordan.” A similar thing occurred with regard to David and Bathsheba’s child.

3. ALONE AT PISGAH (Deuteronomy 34:1-12) A short time after the contention at Meribah, Aaron, along with Moses and Eleazar, must go up on mount Hor. There Moses strips his brother of his priestly garments and puts them upon Eleazar, his nephew. “Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain” (Numbers 20:28). At the time of the golden calf, Aaron had been spared. When the fire of the Lord destroyed Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire, Aaron had kept silent, aware that the fault of his sons was not as grave as his own had been. Once more he is spared. Now at the end of his life he must die, stripped of the garments that marked the high position to which he had been called. His faith, like that of his brother, had been defective at the critical moment. For a few more months Moses will remain alone at the head of the people. His last year is quite occupied. The entire book of Deuteronomy is filled with his memories. As legislator, he briefly restates the ordinances, gives new instructions for the land, and makes his last recommendations to the people. In the presence of all the people he invests Joshua with the authority needed to assume the succession. He gives expression to the song which will remind Israel of the warnings of the Lord. Before dying he blesses the tribes one after the other, thus showing that he is aware of the future ruin of the people as well as God’s resources for them.

Before leaving those whom he has served and led so faithfully, he pronounces these last words: “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27). In his prayer preserved in Psalms 90:1-17, he can say: “LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.” Had not this communion, this intimacy with God, marked his career on earth from the burning bush to the plains of Moab? Alluding to such vital fellowship, the Lord Jesus will later say: “Abide in me, and I in you” (John 15:1-27). The God whom the fathers had known, the God who had revealed Himself to Moses, was always the same. His eternal arms had carried him as He carried his people through all these years. The last day arrives. Moses leaves the plains of Moab where the tents of the people were pitched, and slowly goes up to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah. His work is completed. He has led this nation through so many difficulties and obstacles up to the frontier of the land. He has also communicated to them the thoughts of God. Now his task is finished, although not in the way he would really have liked, since he cannot introduce Israel into the land. Unlike Aaron, he does not have a brother and a son near him to assist him in his last moments. Even his faithful Joshua who had accompanied him at Sinai has remained in the plain. A greater One, however, comes near to him and lets him experience His presence and intimacy: “This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have caused you to see it with your eyes.” Abraham of old had walked “in the land through its length and its width,” knowing that God would give it to his descendants (Genesis 13:17). The men of faith of Hebrews 11:1-40 saw from afar the promised things, the heavenly land, and they embraced them. John at Patmos, aware of the ruin of the assembly (Revelation 2:1-29; Revelation 3:1-22), saw the heavenly city, the Lamb’s wife (Revelation 21:1-27). At the thorn-bush, Moses had been alone with God on holy ground. There the I AM THAT I AM revealed Himself and constrained His servant to accept the mission being entrusted to him. At Sinai as lawgiver, he had been alone with the Lord on two occasions of forty days each. Then in the cleft of the rock, he had learned to know God’s thoughts of grace.

How many times this leader, tired of the ingratitude of the people, had entered the most holy place to listen in the silence of the sanctuary to the voice speaking to him from off the mercy-seat? (Numbers 7:89). "And he spoke to Him." Now on barren Pisgah at this supreme moment of Moses' life, His faithful and well known Friend is there near His servant.

After contemplating the good land which God will give to His people, Moses, alone, falls asleep. The Lord Himself buries him in the valley and no man knows his sepulchre to this day. God takes care of the body of His servant, just as later He will make sure that the body of His Son is given the right burial. The Epistle of Jude records a dispute between Michael and Satan about the body of Moses. God watches, lest the enemy might make of it an object of veneration and idolatry as he did with the brass serpent.

One day Moses did enter the promised land. On the mount of transfiguration, he saw in glorious humanity, the Face that had remained hidden at Sinai (Luke 9:28-31). The purpose of this meeting was not to speak of the past and of all that had been involved in the journey through the wilderness. Neither was it to consider the remote future when the glory of the Son of God would shine in His kingdom. Rather, it was to speak of His death which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. In the Passover lamb and in the Levitical sacrifices, Moses had presented the type. Now the reality was there: Jesus was to be presented as the propitiation "that He [God] might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." The marvelous vision disappears; the cloud takes away Moses and Elijah until the day of resurrection; the disciples no longer see anyone but "Jesus alone with them."

Moses — man of God, man of faith, deliverer, leader, shepherd, lawgiver, mediator, intercessor, prophet, and so frequently a type of Christ. This great figure of Moses remains before us unique and lonely so that considering the outcome of his conduct, we might imitate his faith (Hebrews 13:7).

#### THINKING THINGS THROUGH

1. Describe the unhappy situation in which Miriam and Aaron begin complaining against Moses because of his wife. How does this illustrate the strife and murmurings which can arise in an assembly?
2. What personal lessons do you learn from Moses' response (or lack of response) to the complaints against him?
3. Consider the rebellion of Korah and his allies against Moses and Aaron: their complaints, their presumption and God's judgment upon them. Why do you suppose the congregation generally sided with these rebels after all Moses had done for them? What can you learn from Moses about the right attitude towards those who show cruel and unjust ingratitude towards us?
4. Explain the difference between priesthood then and now. Considering this vast difference, what are the lessons we can yet learn from this rebellion against God's established priesthood?
5. Describe the incident at Meribah where Moses hit the rock. Considering the forty long years in which Moses had borne with this disobedient and rebellious people, we might excuse him for acting in anger and self-will, but how did God view it? Yet, what do the further references to Moses in the Bible reveal as to what God wants us to remember about His beloved servant? (Luke

9:28-31; Acts 7:1-60; Hebrews 3:1-5; Hebrews 11:23-29; etc.).

6. Walk with Moses up to Pisgah and meditate there upon his last moments, alone with God. Such times with God had been the secret of his blessed and fruitful career, and his refuge in frequent troubles. How much do you know of time spent alone with God? Consider your daily schedule in the light of this vital necessity.

## 2.00. The Prophet Jeremiah

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The Prophet Jeremiah George André

André TPJ: 01 Family and Calling André TPJ: 02 Boldness André TPJ: 03 Persecution André TPJ: 04 Discouragement André TPJ: 05 Baruch (Jeremiah 36:1-32) André TPJ: 06 The Choice

Foreword This book is not a commentary on the Book of Jeremiah, but an outline of his personality, life, and service. Characterized by faithfulness and obedience in a time of weakness and confusion, Jeremiah spoke the final words of Jehovah in Jerusalem, where He had placed “the remembrance of His name”, before this city was destroyed. Soon afterward began “the times of the Gentiles,” a period which continues to the present and will last until Israel finally acknowledges its Messiah.

Jeremiah was a weak and timid man, but God’s power worked in him. As one has said, “What matters is not knowing the ambassador, but knowing the Power that sends him. Those who despise him despise not the man, but the One who sends him” (W. Kelly). The tragedy of this prophet lay in his constant obligation to forewarn of judgment while his whole inner self recoiled from such a prospect.

How different our part! To us is given the opportunity to present the gospel of grace and salvation through our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

## 2.01. Chapter 1 - Family and Calling

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### Chapter 1 - Family and Calling 1. Family (Jeremiah 1:1)

Although known as a prophet, Jeremiah belonged to the family of “the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin.” As far as we know, he never acted as a priest. His village of Anathoth, a little over three miles northeast of Jerusalem, had been given to the priests, descendants of Aaron, of the family of the Kohathites (Joshua 21:18; 1 Chronicles 6:60). Abiathar the priest was from Anathoth (1 Kings 2:26). In Zerubbabel’s time the village was repopled by 128 of its inhabitants who had returned from captivity as a result of the edict of Cyrus, king of Persia. Jeremiah, although a Levite, was regarded as a Benjaminite since his birthplace lay in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin.

He was the son of Hilkiyah. Was his father the high priest frequently mentioned during the reign of Josiah, or was he another Hilkiyah? We do not know for sure. Let us remember, however, the following points about Hilkiyah the high priest. In 1 Chronicles 6:13 he is named in the list of Aaron’s descendants. Gemariah his son is often mentioned by Jeremiah (for instance, in Jeremiah 29:3). Ezra, the scribe, was one of his descendants.

Hilkiyah is especially known for having, along with Shaphan, recovered the book of the Law. In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, five years after Jeremiah began to prophesy, Hilkiyah and Shaphan had collected the money gathered by the people and brought into the house of Jehovah to pay for the work performed on the temple. On this occasion the high priest finds the book of the Law in the house of Jehovah (2 Kings 22:3-8). Josiah, very impressed after hearing the words of the book, sends Hilkiyah, Shaphan, and some others to Huldah the prophetess to receive from her mouth the word of the Lord in this respect. Huldah can only confirm the chastisements announced in the book toward the people that were abandoning God. However, the king humbled himself and, as a result, the judgment was suspended during the rest of his life.

Josiah took deeply to heart every instruction of the Scriptures, especially those of Deuteronomy. He read to the people “all the words of the book of the covenant” (2 Kings 23:1-31). Then he commanded that all the vessels that had been gathered and used for idolatrous purposes be brought out of the temple and burned (2 Kings 23:4). He abolished the high places in the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem. He ordered that the Asherah be brought out from the house of Jehovah and burned at the torrent Kidron. He abolished institutionalized prostitution in the temple, and tore down the houses used for this purpose. Gradually, he purified the entire country. He even carried out the prophecy of the man of God who was sent to Bethel in the time of King Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:1-34) to announce that the bones of the priests of the high places would be burned on an altar.

Once the country had been purified, Josiah commanded that the Passover be held in Jerusalem. The worship of God was restored and everything pertaining to idolatry and the occult was destroyed, in order to “perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiyah the

priest had found in the house of Jehovah.”

Let us focus our attention once again on Jeremiah. Whether or not his father actually was the high priest, there is no doubt that he feared the Lord and His Word. On the other hand, Jeremiah’s family did not accept his prophecy, for we read, “Even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee, even they have cried aloud after thee” (Jeremiah 12:6). Jeremiah never married in accordance with God’s command: “You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place” (Jeremiah 16:2).

Disgraced by his brethren, Jeremiah led a solitary life, having neither wife nor children. This loneliness was a heavy burden for him. However, he occasionally enjoyed the support of friends who stood up for him. In all this he is a type of the One who was to come later - the humble, solitary Man who was rejected by His brethren in spite of all the grace he displayed.

## 2. Background (Jeremiah 1:2-3)

Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem and Judah during the 41 year period from 629 to 588 BC. The word came to him “in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign ... also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah . . . until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive.” After the final deportation, he continued his service in relative obscurity among the poor of the country whom Nebuchadnezzar had left. Subsequently he followed into Egypt the remnant of the people who took refuge in that country. Very probably he died there after having given his last known prophecy (Jeremiah 44:1-30).

Thus Jeremiah witnessed the entire sad history of the last kings of Judah.

After the death of Josiah, three of his sons and one of his grandsons ascended to the throne. First Jehoahaz, his third son, reigned for three months. Afterwards Jehoiakim, Josiah’s eldest son, occupied the throne for eleven years. Jehoiakim’s eighteen year-old son, Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah) reigned for three months and ten days. Zedekiah, the last son of Josiah, at the age of 21 replaced his nephew on the throne and reigned eleven years. Among the descendants of Jehoiachin, the grandson of Josiah, we find a Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2; Haggai 2:2) or Salathiel (Matthew 1:12). This man was the father or grandfather of Zerubbabel, governor of Israel at the time of the return from captivity in accordance with the edict of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-11 & Ezra 2:1-70).

JOSIAH

JEHOAHAZ third son

(3 months)

JEHOIAKIM

(eldest son)

(11 years)

ZEDEKIAH youngest son

(11 years)

JEHOIACHIN (JECONIAH) (3months, 10 days)

SHEALTIEL

ZERUBBABEL

Josiah reigned thirty-one years. It was during the thirteenth year of his reign that Jeremiah began to prophesy. The following eighteen years were a relatively easy period in the prophet's life. The degree to which he felt the king's death is well expressed in 2 Chronicles 35:25, "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah." These lamentations have not been kept for us. \*

After Josiah, Judah sank into religious and political decadence. None of the descendants of this pious king feared the Lord. Invasions from the north increased in number. Three consecutive times the enemy looted the country and returned to Babylon with their captives and their treasures, including the vessels of the house of Jehovah (2 Chronicles 36:7). The departure of these vessels marks the beginning of the "time of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). Daniel and his companions were carried away into captivity at that time. (Daniel 1:1-2, Daniel 1:6).

Habakkuk and Zephaniah prophesied in Judah during Jeremiah's time. Daniel and Ezekiel, also prophets during this time, ministered in Babylon. In His grace, God was still speaking to His people despite their accumulated sins and hardened hearts. But they did not pay attention.

### 3. Calling (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

What a memorable day in the life of Jeremiah when God spoke to him, establishing him as a prophet! The calling of Isaiah had been different. Seeing the Lord on His throne in the midst of Seraphim proclaiming His holiness, Isaiah had cried, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" But the glowing coal taken from the altar where the victim had been burned provided propitiation for his sins. Then he could answer the Lord's call: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" with the words, "Here am I! Send me." (Isaiah 6:1-8)

Nothing like this happened to Jeremiah. God simply spoke to him in his early youth declaring in a few precise statements why He chose to send him: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:4-10). This is God's foreknowledge. For us it is connected with His election before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:2; Ephesians 1:4). The motives of this great plan are not revealed to us. But to Jeremiah the Lord revealed more, "Before you were born I sanctified you." Like the apostle Paul, Jeremiah was set apart from his mother's womb (see Galatians 1:4, Acts 9:15; Acts 22:14). Then God spoke further to him, "I ordained you a prophet to the nations," and finally "I shall send you."

These passages seem to show that from past eternity there has been an election on God's part. Furthermore, each servant of the Lord receives a definite call. This is followed by training in "the school of God" through various means before the servant is actually engaged in service (see Galatians 2:1).

Jeremiah, still quite young, is frightened at the prospect of this divinely appointed mission. He meekly protests, "Ah, Lord God! Behold I cannot speak, for I am a youth." You will recall that Moses, when much older, made the same objection when the Lord chose to send him into Egypt (Exodus 4:10). Amos reminds us that he was not the son of a prophet nor a prophet himself, but a

simple and poor shepherd. God, however, had taken him while he was tending the flock, and had said to him, "Go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (Amos 7:14-15). Timothy also was young and timid; nevertheless the apostle wanted Timothy to accompany him (Acts 16:3).

Isn't it true that we make similar objections? Sometimes we feel too young or too ignorant to pray in the presence of others. Often, in fellowship at the Lord's Table, we feel too timid to pray in the assembly! The years go by and we still feel too young or perhaps too inadequate, and we remain silent until middle age and finally old age arrives! And what about the outward testimony? How often we feel our own inadequacy to speak of the Lord and to let the testimony of His grace shine! We forget that when the Lord invites us to serve in this way, there are resources in Himself sufficient to enable us to respond to His invitation. When the Lord miraculously fed the crowd in the desert, He commanded His disciples, "Give ye them to eat." Hearing this order of the Lord's, the disciples could not understand how five loaves and two fishes could possibly feed so many people. But what did Jesus say? "Bring them here to me." Then He multiplied the meager resources of the disciples and not only satisfied the entire crowd, but had a number of baskets still left over. As for Jeremiah, the Lord deals with him in the time of his weakness by giving him words of encouragement as well as words of promise. First he gives him the definite order, "You shall go" (Jeremiah 1:7). He had spoken similarly to Gideon (who thought he was the least in his father's house) with the words, "Go in this might of yours" (Jude 1:6: Jude 1:14). God says further to Jeremiah, "Whatever I command you, you shall speak," Then, calming his mind still further He states, "I am with you to deliver you." This same voice which encouraged Jeremiah and Gideon was heard by the great apostle Paul at Corinth, having arrived there "In weakness, in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3). It spoke to him in a night vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you" (Acts 18:9-10).

Jeremiah was not to speak on the basis of what he had in himself, God put forth His hand and touched the young man's mouth saying, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth." God would reveal things to him which he must faithfully transmit to others. As for us, we should neither expect nor desire revelations, since we possess the entire Scripture which is "profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction." In his last words to Timothy, the apostle said, "Proclaim the word; be urgent in season and out of season, convict, rebuke, encourage."

What a contrasting message was to be preached by Jeremiah: "See, I have this day set you ... to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down." It was the tragic element of his life to constantly prophesy judgment, destruction and captivity. In some pages of his book, it is true, Jeremiah forecasts a blessing, but this is far off in the future (Jeremiah 31:28). The essential part of his message consists of warning the people about the unavoidable judgments which they will endure because of their proud and obstinate hearts. But our situation as well as our message is much different. "How beautiful are the feet of them that announce glad tidings of peace, of them that announce glad tidings of good things" (Romans 10:15). Isaiah had had a vision of it, that is, of the feet of Him who announces glad tidings of peace (Isaiah 52:7). From that time on, in the steps of the Lord Jesus, how many messengers have been sent to proclaim the same gospel; and, to warn sinners of the dangers threatening them (Hebrews 2:3). Jesus entrusted to His disciples and to us after them, the mission to preach in His name "repentance and remission of sins" (Luke 24:47). When for the first time Peter preached to the nations, he presented Jesus as Judge of living and dead; and concluded by saying, "Whoever believes in Him receives remission of sins"

(Acts 10:43). Back in Jerusalem Peter became the object of criticism on the part of the brethren “of the circumcision” who contended with him saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” The apostle explained how he was led by the Lord. After hearing Peter out, they could only keep silent and conclude that “Then indeed God has to the nations also granted repentance to life.” In his ministry Paul proclaimed the same message, “testifying to both Jews and Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). A Christian preaching the gospel is expected to warn his hearers of the judgment coming to those who refuse the good tidings. His main purpose, however, is to present these tidings of grace, whereas Jeremiah’s task was primarily to announce judgment and destruction. In order to encourage His servant, the Lord shows him the rod of an almond tree, a tree which blossoms just about in the middle of winter. In the Hebrew language this tree is called the “watchful” or “vigilant” tree. It reminds us of God who watches over His Word and causes it to be proclaimed “early,” as is suggested by the word “arise” so frequently used in the book of Jeremiah. The almond tree reminds us also of Aaron’s staff, a dead stick which in one night “had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms” (Numbers 17:1-13). This is a type of the living power which was in Christ and which raised him from the dead. It is the same power which operates in every believer and causes him to pass from death to life (Ephesians 1:19-20) The vision of the almond tree was encouraging, whereas that of the seething pot filled the prophet with dismay. This “seething pot” (“the face of which is from the north”) was about to tip over and spill its contents on the ground. It typified calamity coming from the kingdoms of the north (i.e., Syria and Babylon) and about to break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. So imminent was the judgment that the prophet was compelled to deliver his message faithfully, however painful it was to him. The moment comes for the young man to begin his mission. “Therefore prepare yourself and arise, and speak to them” (Jeremiah 1:17). So that he might not be frightened, God presents to him three objects designed to give him confidence: a strong city, an iron pillar, and brazen walls. But He makes it clear to Jeremiah that He is imparting boldness to him, not in favor of the land and of its princes, but “against” the kings of Judah, the priests, and the people of the land (Jeremiah 1:18). Once more, how different with us! To us is imparted the joy of presenting the gospel not “against” those around us, but in their favor. The Lord renews his promise, “I am with you ... to deliver you.” The people and their rulers will undoubtedly fight against the prophet; persecution and suffering will occur, but “They shall not prevail against you.” This assurance of God’s presence with him encourages the young prophet and gives him boldness to deliver his message. The same promise accompanied Moses the law-giver (Exodus 3:13); Gideon the judge (Judges 6:2); Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the chiefs of the people returned from exile (Haggai 2:4). Likewise, so many others after them, such as Timothy with whom the apostle left this last wish, “The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (2 Timothy 4:22).

Thinking Things Through 1. What attitudes toward God were being held by the people of Judah during Jeremiah’s time?

What occurrences during the lifetime of Jeremiah evidenced these attitudes?

How did these things affect Jeremiah?

2. What was Jeremiah’s first response to his call? Do we make the same response to God’s calling?

What should our response be and why?

3. What was the nature of the message Jeremiah preached?

How is this message different from the news we bring to the world today?

## 2.02. Chapter 2 - Boldness

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### Chapter 2 - Boldness

Boldness was not natural to Jeremiah. Quite the contrary. It was the power of God and of His Spirit alone, at work in the prophet, which induced him to deliver (over the course of so many years) the warnings he was given by the Lord for his people and their rulers.

#### 1. Public Speaking

What a trial for this timid young man to convey publicly to his hearers the word that God had given him for them! Let's mention a few instances. In Jeremiah 2:1-2 he must "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord'." In Jeremiah 7:1-2 the test becomes more severe since he must "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the Lord!" Then in the early years of Jehoiakim's reign, having ministered for nineteen years, he is called upon to "Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them." He must not diminish a word. (Jeremiah 26:1-2). This involved more than private conversations or talks addressed to a few. Everyone in Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah was to hear the divine warnings by means of a public and general proclamation. In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom lifts up her voice. "She takes her stand on the top of the high hill, beside the way where the paths meet. She cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city, at the entrance of the doors" (Proverbs 8:1-3). Although it was prophesied of the Lord Jesus that "He shall not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street", when occasion required it, He would stand and cry, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). A lamp is not lit to be put under a bushel or under a bed, but upon a lamp stand. Its function is to shine so that "they who enter in may see the light." Likewise the "city situated on the top of a mountain cannot be hid" (Matthew 5:14-15; Luke 8:16). Today believers are exhorted not only to exercise a "holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God," but they also are a "kingly priesthood to show the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness to his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:5, 1 Peter 2:9).

What a privilege to be able to proclaim the message of grace! What a contrast to Jeremiah's message of judgment.

2. Messages to the People In chapter two, the prophet recalls the blessings of former times, "Thus says the Lord: I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord, the firstfruits of His increase." This reminder of the time when Israel left Egypt resembles the period of early conversion. It is much like a young person who has been truly brought to the Lord and is full of joy because of it.

Later the Lord established the people in Canaan: "I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality" (Jeremiah 2:21). Earlier Isaiah had recalled the care of the Lord for His vineyard

(Isaiah 5:1,2). Jesus Himself stressed the same care in His parable about the husbandmen (Mark 12:1). But Israel had already forsaken their God at the very time He was leading them in the way (Jeremiah 2:17). What a bitter experience it is to forsake God! Because the people were not aware of what they had done, the prophet, as it were, leads them to a hilltop and declares, "See your way in the valley; know what you have done. You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways" (Jeremiah 2:23). Should we not also look back at every stage of our lives and consider the path already covered? What kind of footsteps have we left behind us? Have we unswervingly followed the Lord, or have we wandered about, seeking our own interest and not the Lord's? In chapter 7 the prophet exposes the double life of the people. On one hand they spoke of "The temple of the Lord" as their possession. They did not fail to stand before the Lord in "This house which is called by My name." They even thought that God had delivered them to continue in their abominations (Jeremiah 7:10). Indeed, they had every appearance of godliness, even to assembling together in the place of God's choice, but what about their actual behavior? How much injustice, oppression and idolatry? Because their actions so contradicted their outward profession, judgment, would come upon them and upon their temple. Does this not resemble the conduct of some of us? Should not each of us consider it before God? Many have been reared within the Christian circle and continue to walk there. They attend assembly meetings and outwardly maintain a Christian life style. However, like the foolish virgins of Matthew 25:1-46 who had lamps without oil, they lead a double life which leaves considerable room for the world and its covetousness. What a risk they take - the risk of eventually finding that "The door was shut." This explains why Jeremiah had to deliver a message of judgment. Although he exhorted the people to return to "the old paths"(Jeremiah 6:16) they determined not to do so. Although he reminded them that watchmen had been set over them to warn them, they refused to listen. So He spoke further, "Hear, O earth! Behold I will certainly bring calamity on this people, even the fruit of their thoughts... Behold a people comes from the north country, and a great nation will be raised from the farthest parts of the earth" (Jeremiah 6:19-25). The seething pot was about to boil over, bringing distress, anguish and terror from the north.

Failing to grasp the situation, the people asked, "Why has the Lord pronounced all this great disaster against us? Or what is our iniquity? Or what is the sin that we have committed?" (Jeremiah 16:10). How similar are the words of those who listen to the gospel but do not want to acknowledge that they are guilty and lost. Feeling that they have led a well-ordered and honest life, they forget that man's worst sin is to reject Christ and His work: "Your fathers have forsaken me ... and have walked after other gods ... and you ... (walk) according to the imagination of your own evil heart ... no one listens to Me" (Jeremiah 16:11-12). This judgment must be announced by Jeremiah time and again throughout his life. In chapter 25 (that is, in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, 607-606 BC) the first year deportation into exile takes place; Daniel is led off to Babylon, and some of the vessels of the temple are carried away. Jeremiah reminds the people that "From the thirteenth year of Josiah ... even to this day, this is the twenty-third year in which the word of the Lord has come to me; and I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not listened" (Jeremiah 25:3). God sends them other prophets, but the people also refuse to listen to them or leave their evil ways. Judgment is at the door, and yet they turn a deaf ear to Jeremiah's warnings. The seventy-year captivity in Babylon begins in the year 606 as announced by the prophet (Jeremiah 25:11), after which a remnant will come back with Zerubbabel in order to rebuild the temple, as related in the first chapters of Ezra. The sacred

vessels carried away to Babylon and desecrated by king Belshazzar will be partly brought back (in obedience to the edict of Cyrus) and put in the restored temple (Ezra 1:7-11). These vessels represented the worship rendered to God. The period of seventy years between their removal and return, as announced by the prophet, emphasizes their symbolic importance. To more effectively impress the people with the message of the Lord, Jeremiah is led to use various illustrations. One day he must buy a linen belt and wear it without washing it (Jeremiah 13:1-27). Then God ordered him to go and hide it in a rock crevice near the Euphrates River. Jeremiah undertakes this harrowing journey without arguing about it. After a long time he must return to the Euphrates and dig it up, only to find that the belt was “ruined ... profitable for nothing” (Jeremiah 13:7). For the inhabitants of Anathoth and for the entire people, the allegory is obvious: “For as the (belt) clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to me,” says the Lord (Jeremiah 13:11). But their pride, their refusal to listen to the words of the prophets, the obstinacy of their idolatrous heart, could only earn them exile on the shores of the Euphrates. On another occasion Jeremiah must visit the potter’s house (Jeremiah 18:1-23) and observe his work. “And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.” From this, Jeremiah draws a lesson: If the people turn away from their evil ways and doings, God may repent of His sentence against them. On the other hand, if finally they turn away from him, the announced blessing can be lost. This change of mind on the part of God (the Greek word “metanoia” means repentance or change of mind) does not imply any regret as to His initial decision. Rather it manifests His grace and righteousness in suspending the sentence when he discerns the least sign of repentance in the guilty one. On many occasions, this patience of God is mentioned in Scripture. For example, at the time of the flood, “the long-suffering of God waited” (1 Peter 3:20); and again: for such an ungodly man as Ahab king of Israel, the Lord exhibited His patience (1 Kings 21:27-29). Even in the case of “Jezebel” who introduced corruption into the church, God’s patience is displayed: “I gave her time that she should repent.” (Revelation 2:21).

Another time Jeremiah is invited to buy a potter’s earthen bottle. Then in the sight of the elders of the people and the elders of the priests, the prophet breaks the bottle. Thus God will “break this people and this city as one breaks a potter’s vessel which cannot be made whole again.” (Jeremiah 19:11).

Chapter 27 speaks of six yokes which Jeremiah is called upon to send to several kings; and he has to put one upon his own neck. This is a sign of the servitude to which all of them must be reduced by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

However, the prophet’s practical illustrations have no more real effect on the people than his preaching did.

3. Messages to the Chief Men On various occasions, Jeremiah spoke to the leaders of the people.. In Jeremiah 21:1-7 he answers the two emissaries of King Zedekiah who were sent to him with the hope that God would deliver Judah from the king of Babylon through the prophet’s intervention. Jeremiah, however, does not allow himself to be impressed by the importance of the messengers. He can only confirm the judgment already announced. On the other occasion he speaks to King Jehoiakim himself (Jeremiah 22:1,Jeremiah 22:18). Without hesitation, he points out the king’s pride and hardness, his selfishness, his vain-glory, his lack of concern for the

welfare of his people (Jeremiah 22:13-17).

It is too late to bemoan his predecessors. Good King Josiah was dead (Jeremiah 22:10). Jehoahaz had been captured and would never see his native land again (Jeremiah 22:10-12). With regard to Jehoiakim himself, he will die violently with none to lament him. Further, "He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 22:18-19). Despite this frightening prophecy, the king refuses to listen.

Jeremiah next rebukes the shepherds (Jeremiah 23:1) who destroyed and scattered the flock, instead of visiting them and caring for them. Ezekiel, the prophet of the captivity, had the same message for the shepherds of Israel (Ezekiel 34:1-31). They did not strengthen the weak sheep. They did not heal the sick. They did not bind up what was broken. They did not restore those who were driven away. Neither did they seek for that which was lost. They ruled over them with harshness and with rigor (Ezekiel 34:4), and the sheep were "scattered." While allowing for differences in times and places, is it not true that similar practices have been repeated throughout the Church's history, even at times within the assemblies? Harshness and rigor have caused scattering. Sick, wounded, and wandering sheep result when proper care is not provided and when only "the fat and the strong" are considered.

Jeremiah next reproached the prophets (Jeremiah 23:9, Jeremiah 23:16). Instead of conveying to their hearers the Word of the Lord, "They speak a vision of their own heart." Instead of standing in the council of God and causing His people to hear His Word (Jeremiah 23:22), they go forth according to their own thoughts. How dangerous is that unfaithfulness which warps or even falsifies the message of God's Word through bringing in one's own opinions. "I did not send these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (Jeremiah 23:21).

Jeremiah speaks also to the priests - those responsible in the sphere of religious activity. He especially warns them concerning "the vessels of the Lord's house" (Jeremiah 27:16). Contrary to the words of the false prophets, these vessels would not yet be brought back from Babylon. Rather, the vessels still left in the temple would eventually be carried away. Such a sad prospect should have brought those responsible for the worship of God to repentance. But they did not care.

More than once the prophet did not shrink back from speaking directly to King Zedekiah. His message no longer resembled the one delivered during the time of the previous kings when repentance would have suspended the execution of judgment. More than one had been exiled; God now commanded the people to submit to discipline. They were not to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, but to accept the yoke, to surrender, and to serve the king of Babylon. Instead of humbling themselves, Zedekiah and the rest of the people persisted in resisting the Lord's command.

Immediately upon Zedekiah's coronation, Jeremiah speaks to him (Jeremiah 27:12) and exhorts him to bring his neck "under the yoke of the king of Babylon" and to serve him. During the siege of Jerusalem he again warns him of the consequences of disobedience, "You shall not escape from his hand ... your eyes shall see the eyes of the king of Babylon" (Jeremiah 34:1-7).

Maybe Zedekiah was somewhat impressed by the prophet's insistence. "When Jeremiah entered the dungeon and the cells, and ... had remained there for many days, then Zedekiah the king sent

and ... asked him secretly, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (Jeremiah 37:15-17). These had been frightful months for Jeremiah, and he could have understandably tempered his message somewhat to get deliverance. However, remaining faithful to the mission entrusted to him by God, he answers: "You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." A short time later Zedekiah orders the prophet to be brought to him at the third entrance of the house of the Lord (Jeremiah 38:14). For the last time Jeremiah exhorts the king to "freely go forth to the king of Babylon's princes", and to accept God's discipline. Jeremiah assures Zedekiah that he would not be given over into the hands of the Jews that had deserted to the Chaldeans: "Please, obey the voice of the Lord which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you" (Jeremiah 38:20). The king hesitates a while, but is unable to reach a decision. In the tenth month of the ninth year of the reign of Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar comes and besieges Jerusalem. Sixteen months later the city is broken up (Jeremiah 39:1-2). As the king of Judah and his men of war flee, they are pursued and overtaken by the army of the Chaldeans. Captured, Zedekiah is taken to Riblah, where Nebuchadnezzar pronounces judgment upon him. "The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes, and the king of Babylon slaughtered all the nobles of Judah; and he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with chains of brass, to carry him to Babylon" (Jeremiah 39:6-7). Jerusalem is taken; the house of the king and the houses of the people are burned; the walls of the city are broken down; the temple is plundered and destroyed, and the people are taken captive to Babylon (2 Kings 25:9-11). Overwhelmed with these misfortunes, Jeremiah writes his "Lamentations".

"How lonely sits the city that was full of people ... She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears are on her cheeks ... Judah has gone into captivity ... She dwells among the nations, and finds no rest" (Lamentations 1:1-13). God has given full vent to His anger against "the daughter of Zion" (Lamentations 2:1-2). The altar has been cast off. The sanctuary has been rejected. The walls of the palaces have been given into the hand of the enemy. They have shouted loudly in the house of God. The ramparts and the wall have been destroyed. The gates are broken down. The princes have been exiled among the nations. The law is in effect no more, and the prophets find no vision from the Lord. The elders sit upon the ground in silence and have put dust upon their heads. The virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground (Lamentations 2:7-10). The prophet mentions how frightful the siege of Jerusalem had been. Young children were asking for bread, but there was none to give. Those who feasted on delicacies shortly before, were perishing in the streets. Those who were brought up in fine clothing now embrace ash heaps. It was better to be slain with the sword than to die from hunger. Women in their despair were eating their own children (Lamentations 4:4-10).

Everything is destroyed; all is finished. Everything has sunk into despair. "The joy of our heart has ceased; our dance has turned into mourning. The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!" (Lamentations 5:15-16). When everything has crumbled, what is left? "You, O Lord, remain forever" (Lamentations 5:19). This is the verse that one of our sisters discovered inscribed on a wall among the ruins of a mission in China. Despite the rebellion that was driving the Christians out of the country, the Lord Himself remained. One of our brethren who was looking over the ruins of London after the war found the following words engraved on the lintel of a door that was still standing among the wreckage: "For we know that if our earthly house be destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2

Corinthians 5:1)

“You remain.” Is not Jeremiah’s supreme and unwavering hope placed before us as an example to firmly trust the One who remains and is coming soon - in spite of the evil that surrounds and the judgment that is imminent?

Thinking Things Through 1. What were some of the messages Jeremiah had for the people of Judah?

How might the prophet’s messages be applied to us?

How did the people react toward Jeremiah’s messages?

2. What special messages were aimed at the leaders of Judah?

What special difficulties did the prophet encounter due to his message to this group of people?

3. What were the circumstances surrounding the writing of the book of Lamentations?

What is the Christian hope in the midst of the “lamentable condition of the world”?

## 2.03. Chapter 3 - Persecution

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### Chapter 3 - Persecution

During Josiah's lifetime Jeremiah enjoyed a measure of protection. Even if the people did not listen to his preaching, it appears that he was not openly resisted. After Josiah's death, things changed.

1. His Family (Jeremiah 11:18-19, Jeremiah 11:21; Jeremiah 12:7-11) At first Jeremiah was not aware of his family's hostility. But then God warns him, "For even your brothers, the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you ... Do not believe them, even though they speak smooth words to you" (Jeremiah 12:6). Along with the inhabitants of Anathoth, they were seeking the life of the prophet and wanting to put an end to his preaching (Jeremiah 11:26). Jeremiah was ignorant of these plots (Jeremiah 11:19) until he was informed of them by God.

How painful it is to have to live in a divided family! The Lord Jesus warns his disciples in this respect: "I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes will be those of his own household" (Matthew 10:35-36). How many tensions arise when one member of a family turns to the Lord and the others are opposed: lack of understanding, sometimes overt acts of hostility, and in some countries even persecution. We should be very grateful if the grace has been granted to us to live in a closely-knit family where each member loves the Lord and seeks to serve Him! A beautiful example is offered us by "the house of Stephanas ... the firstfruits of Achaia" who had "devoted themselves to the saints for service" (1 Corinthians 16:15). They all belonged to the Lord, and each one desired to serve Him.

Having been unsuccessful in carrying out their plans, Jeremiah's relatives destroy his heritage and his vineyard. He was forced to give up his house and the small plot of land which he had received from his father. A graphic picture is drawn of Jeremiah as with sadness he considers his destroyed vineyard and his portion trodden under foot (Jeremiah 12:7-11). \* We may even wonder when Jeremiah speaks of the "beloved of my soul" (Jeremiah 12:7) whether the person alluded to is perhaps a betrothed bride, whom he had to forsake because his hostile family had won her over to their side. Whatever the case, the word of the Lord which came to him a little later was definite: "You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place" (Jeremiah 16:1-2). In loneliness the prophet goes away, forsaking his heritage and his hopes - yet in spite of everything, standing firm in his purpose to proclaim the word of the Lord.

2. The People The people, indignant at Jeremiah's preaching on the occasion of the vessel remodeled by the potter, contrived against the prophet. They decided to "smite him with the tongue", and to spread false rumours about him. Backbiting and slander would effectively stop his preaching and prevent anyone from listening to any of his words. When David had a similar experience he prayed to God, saying, "Hide me from the secret counsel of the evil-doers ... who have sharpened their tongue like a sword, and have aimed their arrow, a bitter word" (Psalms

64:2-3). The “scourge of the tongue” is mentioned in Job 5:21.

Consider the words of the apostle Peter. Before exhorting the saints to exercise their holy priesthood by drawing near to the Lord and offering spiritual sacrifices, he urges them to lay aside “all evil speaking” (1 Peter 2:1). How much harm is done among the people of God by spreading rumors, perhaps true in themselves, which disparage and belittle others. Is it done to enhance one’s own image? And what shall we say of the negative criticism which is aimed at the servants of God - and which risks interfering with their ministry and discrediting their message? Even Paul had this sad experience, especially at Corinth and in Galatia. And was not the Lord Himself accused by false witnesses, and by Pharisees who asserted that He was casting out demons by the prince of demons! What a painful experience for servants of God who are attacked in this way; and what serious consequences will face those who “smite with the tongue” when they stand before the Lord to answer for their words.

Jeremiah had stood before God in order to speak for his people in an attempt to avert the wrath of Jehovah from them (Jeremiah 18:20). Confronted by slander and criticism, the prophet can only say in his prayer. “Lord, give heed to me, and listen to the voice of those that contend with me” (Jeremiah 18:19).

3. Pashur (Jeremiah 20:1-3) On his return from the Valley of Hinnom where he had broken the vessel in the sight of the elders and priests, Jeremiah again stands in the court of the Temple and warns the people of coming judgment. Hearing him prophesy these things, Pashur, a priest and chief officer in the house of God, strikes him and puts him in the stocks at the upper gate of Benjamin. The stocks were instruments of torture. Jeremiah on this occasion has to endure them for the rest of the day and the following night. These were hours of physical and mental sufferings. Their effects on his soul are expressed in Jeremiah 20:10-18.

All through the centuries many believers have been subjected to torture. Stephen was stoned at Jerusalem. Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned at Philippi. There were many martyrs in the first centuries of the church. We also think of the Huguenots and others at the time of the Reformation. Even today many children of God are tormented in various countries. As we read in Hebrews 11:33-38, some are delivered and escape the edge of the sword; others are tortured, undergo trials, are slaughtered, or wander about. The mystery of God allows John the Baptist to perish in prison while Peter is rescued. To Smyrna it is said: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” To Philadelphia the message is: “I also will keep you out of the hour of trial, which is about to come” (Revelation 2:10; Revelation 3:10).

It is interesting, however, that the New Testament does not record the violent deaths of the Lord’s servants except in the case of Stephen in Acts 7:1-60, and only incidentally in the case of James in Acts 12:2. In this way pre-eminence is given to the death of the Lord Jesus, to His sufferings and His being forsaken that He might receive all the attention of our hearts.

4. Priests and Princes (Jeremiah 26:7-16, Jeremiah 26:24)

Years have gone by; Josiah is dead; the brief reign of Jehoahaz has come to an end. Jehoiakim has just ascended the throne. Once more Jeremiah prophesies “in the court of The Lord’s house.” On hearing him the priests, the prophets, and all the people seize him and say, “You will surely die” (Jeremiah 26:8). Attracted by the commotion, the princes of Judah approach the house of the

Lord and hear the unhesitating demand of the priests and prophets, "This man deserves to die!"

Given the opportunity to be heard, Jeremiah reminds the princes of how he has followed God's injunction to speak "against this house and against this city." Then he repeats his exhortation, "Amend your ways and your doings, and hearken to the voice of The Lord your God." If they come back to Him, He will certainly repent of the evil that He has pronounced against them. "As for me, here I am, in your hand; do with me as seems good and proper to you. But know for certain that if you put me to death, you will surely bring innocent blood on yourselves" (Jeremiah 26:14-15). The princes listen to Jeremiah and declare to the priests, "This man is not worthy to die." Some elders of the land recall Micah's prophecy in the time of Hezekiah, to whom the king had listened with the result that judgment was suspended. Ahilam, the son of Shaphan (the scribe who with Hilkiah had discovered the book of the law) intervenes on Jeremiah's behalf, so that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death. (Jeremiah 26:24). This time the prophet is delivered.

5. Captains and Princes (Jeremiah 37:11-21) A few years later, during a temporary interruption of the siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah takes the opportunity to leave the city in order to try to get some provisions in the land of Benjamin. As he is going through the gate, a captain arrests him, accusing him of deserting to the Chaldeans. In vain Jeremiah protests against the untrue accusation. Irijah brings him to the princes. They become very angry and beat the prophet and put him in prison in "the vaults" where he has to remain "many days." This time no one delivers him.

We do not know how long Jeremiah stayed in the dungeon before King Zedekiah sends for him and secretly asks him if there is "any word from the Lord." The anxious king hopes to hear a word of relief. It is a tense moment as the prophet, having already suffered so much, ponders that Zedekiah has the power to either free him or send him back to the dungeon. Then he answers: "There is."

Again there is a brief silence. We can surmise the emotions mingling in Jeremiah's mind: his compassion for the young king vying with his determination to faithfully declare the Lord's message. Again he speaks, "You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon!"

Zedekiah, however, in answer to Jeremiah's supplication does not send him back to the vaults, but has him committed into the court of the guard; "and they gave him daily a loaf of bread ...until all the bread in the city was spent."

6. Responsible Men - Princes (Jeremiah 38:1-6) In spite of everything, Jeremiah continues to proclaim the word of the Lord. However, he no longer urges them to "Amend your ways, repent and the judgment will be suspended." The time of chastisement has arrived. Already Nebuchadnezzar has besieged the city. Therefore the message from God is to accept the judgment from His hand and surrender to the Chaldeans. Upon hearing Jeremiah's words, certain men whose names have been preserved in the Scriptures (Jeremiah 38:1) say to the king, in agreement with the princes, "Please let this man be put to death." In their eyes Jeremiah is a mere traitor - an ally of Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah, who lacks strength of character, delivers him into their hand, realizing that he is powerless before them. These men seize the prophet and cast him into the pit in the court of the guard. "And in the pit there was no water, but mire; and Jeremiah sank in the mire." In Lamentations the prophet recalls the distress of his soul in this terrible

situation: "They that are mine enemies without cause ... have cut off my life in a pit, and cast a stone upon me. Waters streamed over my head; I said, I am cut off" (Lamentations 3:52-54). Feeling that he is perishing, he cries to God: "I called on your name, O Lord, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice. You drew near on the day I called on You, and said, 'do not fear!' O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul; You have redeemed my life" (Lamentations 3:55-58). In answer to the ardent supplication of His servant, the Lord directs Ebedmelech, an Ethiopian eunuch in the king's house, to draw Jeremiah out of his predicament. This man takes it upon himself to go to Zedekiah to intercede for the prophet, obtaining the authorization to deliver him. The king provides thirty men to assist him. Ebed-melech, with much regard for the prisoner, takes old shreds and rags and asks Jeremiah to put them under his armpits beneath the ropes. "And they drew up Jeremiah with the ropes, and brought him up out of the pit."

Once more God delivers His servant. Before the end of the siege, while he was still shut up in the court of the guard, a special word from God was given to him for Ebed-melech. The Ethiopian will be delivered on the day when the city will be taken; he will not be given into the hands of the men he fears; he will have his life for a prize, "because you have put your trust in me, says the Lord" (Jeremiah 39:15-18). God does not forget to reward the instruments that He uses on behalf of those He sends (Matthew 25:34-45).

Thinking Things Through 1. Describe briefly the persecution which Jeremiah suffered from his own family.

How did he respond?

How should we respond when those nearest to us reject us because of the Lord?

2. List some of the ways Jeremiah suffered at the hand of people, priests, princes, and others.

How do all these sufferings typify the sufferings of Christ?

3. Who were some of those who showed kindness and help to Jeremiah in all his distresses?

Consider some of the people you know and situations you face wherein you might follow their good examples.

## 2.04. Chapter 4 - Discouragement

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### Chapter 4 - Discouragement

Jeremiah, although timid by nature, has appeared before us with a God-given boldness which sustained him throughout the persecutions. The Spirit of God, however, does not omit in the Word the moments of discouragement through which he passed during his long career. Let us consider some of them as well as the divine answers granted him.

#### 1. Useless Preaching (Jeremiah 8:21; Jeremiah 9:2)

Jeremiah was keenly aware of the distress that was to be the portion of his nation: "For the breach of the daughter of my people am I crushed ... that I may weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jeremiah 8:21; Jeremiah 9:1)

Nevertheless, he knew very well that the cause of the misfortunes about to come down on his fellow-countrymen was their iniquity, their lies, their refusal to listen to God, their malicious criticism, and all of their acts of deceit and wickedness (Jeremiah 9:3-6).

What use is further prophesying, further warning, when no one will listen? "Oh that I had in the wilderness a traveller's lodging-place, that I might leave my people, and go away from them!" (Jeremiah 9:2). In other words, I've had enough of it all; I'd like to flee to a far away place and have nothing more to do with these people.

David experienced the same feelings when he was being heavily pursued by his enemies: "Oh that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away, and be at rest; behold, I would flee afar off, I would lodge in the wilderness" (Psalms 55:6-7). In his bewilderment Jeremiah does not receive a direct answer from God; but the psalmist presents to us some of the divine resources that undoubtedly were offered to him. When David was fleeing before Saul to the cave (Psalms 57:1), he cried out "Be merciful to me, O God ... For my soul trusts in you; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge until these calamities have passed by." Now he is not seeking the wings of a dove with which to fly away, but the shadow of the wings of the Most High to take refuge under. Thus we read at the end of Psalms 55:1-23, in Psalms 55:22 : "Cast your burden on the Lord and He shall sustain you, He shall never permit the righteous to be moved."

#### 2. In Perplexity (Jeremiah 12:1-3)

As we saw in a previous chapter, the first persecutions which the prophet had to suffer were inflicted upon him by his family and the men of his village. His reaction is depicted at the beginning of chapter 12.

Jeremiah is perplexed. The way of the wicked is prospering; those that deal very treacherously are at ease; with their mouths they speak of God, but He is far from their hearts. And yet, He has planted them, they have taken root, they advance, they bring forth fruit (Jeremiah 12:1-2). As for the prophet whose heart is known by God, who has followed the Lord faithfully, who has answered His call - his trials now overtake him, and his family hates him. But why?

Asaph had the same experience (Psalms 73:1-28): The wicked are prosperous, proud, and arrogant; they are scoffers; they deride God, and yet “They prosper in the world; they heap up riches” (Psalms 73:3-12)! He, Asaph, who has purified his heart, who has washed his hands in innocency, is experiencing daily trials. With painful mental exertion he endeavours to penetrate this mystery of the ways of God: “When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me - until I went into the sanctuary of God.” There the Lord gives an answer to His servant. Asaph now understands the end of the wicked. He experiences the constant presence of the Lord who has held his right hand. Trials have not ceased - “My flesh and my heart fail.” But he has the experiential knowledge that God is the rock of his heart and his portion forever: “There is none upon earth I desire beside you ... but as for me, it is good for me to draw near to God” (Jeremiah 12:7-28). For Jeremiah the answer is not so comforting. Instead, it is a challenge. “If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses?” (Jeremiah 12:5). In other words, if relatively minor trials like those caused by your family are sufficient to weary you, what will you do when greater trials, like charging “horses” or the “swelling of the Jordan,” come upon you? We must learn to endure today’s trials in order to be strengthened for those of tomorrow.

3. Jeremiah, the Object of Painful Opposition (Jeremiah 15:10-21) With time, persecutions increased and Jeremiah had to bear the full brunt of their storm. “Woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me a man of strife ... every one. . curses me” (Jeremiah 15:10). What a burden was this task of constantly prophesying judgment while, the false prophets were predicting peace! It got him only cursing and reproach.

However, he says to the Lord: “Your words were found, and I did eat them, and your words were unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16). The rediscovery of the book of the law had been a very great joy for him; the words of God became his constant food. He had parted company with the mockers, with those who refused God’s Word. He “sat alone.”

What is the good of all that? “Why is my pain perpetual ... It refuses to be healed” (Jeremiah 15:18). Turning toward God he wonders whether or not he has been deceived! He asks, Was I right when I obeyed His call to be a prophet? “Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream, as waters that fail?” Jeremiah’s complaint contains “precious” elements, especially in his appreciation for the Word of God. However, it also contains some “vile” ones (Jeremiah 15:19), such as the distrust that rises in his heart towards the Lord.

Job had cursed the day of his birth. He had profusely reproached God. He had even accused Him. The Lord revealed Himself to His servant, thus bringing him back. Through trial He gave him a deeper knowledge of divine grace, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6). In self-judgment Job finds restoration.

What happens in this regard with Jeremiah? What does the divine Word say to him? “If you return, then I bring you back; you shall stand before me” (Jeremiah 15:19). In other words, Turn away from yourself and in My grace I will bring you back to Me again. “You shall stand before me.” You shall have the portion of the prophet who stands “in the council of the Lord, and has perceived and heard his word” (Jeremiah 23:18). Furthermore, “If you take out the precious from the vile, you shall be as my mouth.” Put aside your accusations and doubts; hold fast to the precious, and you

will go back to your initial calling: “Behold. I have put my words in your mouth” (Jeremiah 1:9). You “sat alone” - fine, you did well. “Let them return to you; but you must not return to them.” Even if you suffer from loneliness, do not associate with these wicked men. The promises of chapter one are repeated almost word for word. “I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall; and they will fight against you but they shall not prevail against you for I am with you, to save you and deliver you” (Jeremiah 15:20; cf. Jeremiah 1:18-19).

#### 4. Put to Torture (Jeremiah 20:7-18)

During the rest of the day and throughout the night Pashur had Jeremiah locked in the stocks. He was positioned at the gate of Benjamin, where everybody could see him subjected to torture and sufferings. The passers-by were able to compete with each other in deriding him. What was his reaction?

Jeremiah reminds God that it was not his desire to be a prophet, but that Jehovah had “enticed” him and had prevailed. What had he benefited from it? Nothing but derision and mockery. “For as oft as I speak, I cry out; I proclaim violence and spoil; for the word of the Lord has become unto me a reproach.” He had said to himself, “I will not make mention of him.” The Word, however, had been in his heart as a burning fire; he became wearied with holding in, and he could not (Jeremiah 20:8-9). From every side they were defaming him. His neighbors (the people of Anathoth) were watching for his stumbling, in order to take their revenge on him.

Nevertheless the prophet regains possession of himself. In the midst of so many trials, the Lord is with him (Jeremiah 20:11-13). The feeling of God’s presence even induces him to sing, to praise, to look forward to the deliverance (Jeremiah 20:13); as also with Paul and Silas in prison much later on. A renewed outbreak of sufferings, however, combined with Satan’s efforts, brings distress back into his heart. “Cursed be the day wherein I was born ... Wherefore came I forth from the womb to see labor and sorrow, that my days should be consumed in shame?” This completes what God has wished to retain in His Word about the state of mind of His servant. Other passages inform us that Jeremiah did not forsake his ministry. The frightful night at the upper gate of Benjamin weighed heavily on his soul. The recollection of this time of distress has been kept for us. Is not the perseverance of the prophet a constant example for us to follow?

5. The Accumulation of Sufferings (Lamentations 3:1-33) The first two chapters in the brief book of Jeremiah’s Lamentations mostly describe Jerusalem and its destruction. In Lamentations 4:1-22 and Lamentations 5:1-22 he recalls the grief and anguish of the siege and the consequences of Nebuchadnezzar’s final victory. At the central point of the book of Lamentations (Lamentations 3:1-66) he relates especially his own trials in language which (as various Psalms) can also apply to the sufferings of Christ. The prophet does not accuse the people and their chiefs of having inflicted on him all the persecutions he endured. Rather, he receives them from the hand of God, saying: “I am the man that has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.” He recalls the years spent in the darkness of prison (Lamentations 3:2, Lamentations 3:6), the deprivation of freedom (Lamentations 3:7, Lamentations 3:9). He remembers the torture that broke his bones (Lamentations 3:4). He calls to mind the mockeries to which he was subjected. “I am become a derision to all my people; their song all the day” (Lamentations 3:14). His life was consumed “far off from peace”; he has “forgotten prosperity” (Lamentations 3:17); all was affliction, wormwood, and gall. “My soul has them constantly in remembrance, and is humbled in me.”

How many moments of distress this faithful man of God had to go through! Certainly his career bears some resemblance to that of the One who would come and be a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” who, more than any other, would be “despised, and ... esteemed ... not.”

While Jeremiah remembers all his sufferings, he does not fail to mention the encouragement he received (Lamentations 3:21-33). “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:21-23). Throughout the centuries these words have sustained the faith of many believers.

It is necessary to learn and in silence to wait for the salvation of God, and also to receive from His hand the discipline allowed. One must even accept loneliness and remain silent because trials come from Him; and because one can rest assured that “if he has caused grief, he will have compassion according to the multitude of his loving-kindnesses.”

## 6. Not Weary

Through all these long and painful years, what is most remarkable is that Jeremiah did not grow weary. Until the end he was faithful to his God, faithful to his prophetic calling, and faithful also to his people despite their rebellion, poverty, and distress. This perseverance is summed up in a few words: “I have not hurried away from being a shepherd who follows you” (Jeremiah 17:16).

Judah and her chiefs said, “Where is the word of the Lord? Let it then come!” You have been announcing judgment for so long, Jeremiah. Let it arrive! We still don’t see the fulfillment of your prophecies! These people resemble the scoffers of our own time, of whom Peter speaks: “Where is the promise of His coming? For from the time the fathers fell asleep, all things remain thus from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:4). We know, however, that the Lord Jesus will come again and first take His own away and then judge the earth. Jeremiah said, “Neither have I desired the fatal day.” He did not wish, like Jonah, to see the fulfillment of his prophecy in order to appear credible before the people. He rather persevered humbly in his service as shepherd and prophet because he was following the One who was to be greater than he, greater than Jonah - the True Servant who “shall not faint nor be in haste, till he has established justice in the earth” (Isaiah 42:4).

Later on Paul would rightly say to those Corinthians who had been causing him so much affliction: “Having this ministry, as we have had mercy shown us, we faint not” (2 Corinthians 4:1). Deeply conscious of the grace granted to him to be a servant of the Lord, the apostle was persevering. He further says, “We faint not; but if indeed our outward man is consumed, yet the inward is renewed day by day ... while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen” (v.16-18). Daily inner renewal is necessary for us to persevere. Our gaze must not linger over our earthly trials, but be directed towards what is beyond, towards the things that are not seen and are eternal. The prophet as well as the apostle left us with this testimony of perseverance: through faith the eyes of the believer look steadfastly on the One “who, in view of the joy lying before him ... endured so great contradiction from sinners against himself.” As a result of this contemplation, we will not grow weary and discouraged in our souls (Hebrews 12:3).

Thinking Things Through

1. In times of discouragement, Jeremiah often felt that his preaching was useless, and he was perplexed. What resources did he find in the Lord at such times? In thinking through your own experiences along this line, consider how the Lord has helped you through them.
2. How can we explain the seeming contradictions in some of the passages where Jeremiah expressed his deep grief, and seems to combine praise to God with accusations against God? See, for example Jeremiah 20:7-18.
3. Jeremiah's love and concern for his people who caused him so much grief, sorrow, and persecution is truly remarkable. Consider this beautiful attitude in the light of some New Testament Scriptures concerning our attitude towards others (Romans 12:10-21; Php 1:1-9).

## 2.05. Chapter 5 - Baruch (Jer\_36:1-32)

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Chapter 5 - Baruch (Jeremiah 36:1-32) The events of this chapter take place in the fourth and fifth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar's army had already invaded the land. A first deportation including Daniel and his companions had taken place (Daniel 1:1-4). A number of the vessels of the temple had been carried away. The king, however, still lived in Jerusalem, and his reign was to last a few more years.

Jeremiah's prophecies which had been proclaimed for twenty-three years had been ignored. The Lord commands him to write "all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you from the days of Josiah, even to this day" (Jeremiah 36:2). Perhaps Judah upon hearing these warnings will give heed to their reading. So the prophet dictated all the words of the Lord to Baruch his friend, who wrote them down on a scroll. This work evidently took a long time, since the book was not read publicly to the people before the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:9). One can well visualize the two men in the house where Jeremiah lived. Under the guidance of the Spirit of God, the prophet carefully dictates the words of the Lord while Baruch applies himself to the task of writing on the scroll. All the while the two men are fully aware that they are transmitting the very words of God to those who would read the message. On account of the seriousness of the prevailing circumstances, a fast before the Lord is proclaimed in the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim's reign. All the people of Judah who come to Jerusalem will be present. Baruch seizes the opportunity and reads the words of Jeremiah "in the house of the Lord, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court, at the entry of the new gate of the house of the Lord, in the ears of all the people" (Jeremiah 36:10). Shaphan, along with Hilkiyah, had found the book of the law at the time when repairs were made in the temple. Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, seems to have followed in the steps of his pious father (Jeremiah 36:26). His own son, Micah, hears "out of the book all the words of the Lord" as they are read aloud by Baruch. He is so impressed by them that he goes down into the scribe's chamber where all the princes had gathered, and declares to them all the words that he has heard (Jeremiah 36:13). (In the same way, young people who are able to attend meetings might have a desire to convey what has been read, or said to ailing or aged persons who are confined to their homes. Such secret service is so useful and greatly appreciated by those to whom it is rendered!) The princes send for Baruch himself, asking him to bring along the roll, so that they might hear from his own mouth the text read to the people.

We may be surprised that this reading of the prophecies which Jeremiah had declared so many times seems to be something entirely new for the princes. Maybe they had seldom heard the prophet, personally. In any case, this incident illustrates the power of the written Word of God. While the Gospel may be preached, it is only the Word of God ("the seed" as the Lord Jesus called it) which is "living and powerful". It is this Word which confronted the princes of Judah that day. When they seek assurance of how the scroll was written, Baruch gives them express confirmation: "He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book."

Knowing the king's instability, the princes advise Jeremiah and Baruch to hide themselves. Then they immediately proceed to the king's court to report to Jehoiakim the prophet's words, leaving the scroll in the room of Elishama the scribe. Desiring to hear the prophet's words himself, Jehoiakim has Jehudi bring the scroll. The messenger then reads the prophecy "in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes that stood beside the king."

"Now the king was sitting in the winterhouse in the ninth month, and with the fire-pan burning before him." A certain majesty marks the scene. On the face of these men an expression of terror appears. From experience, they know too well the terrible power of the Babylonian king who is about to pounce down upon their land.

Scarcely has Jehudi read three or four columns, when Jehoiakim is seized with passion. With the scribe's knife he shreds the scroll and throws it into the fire "until all is consumed." Three men, including Gemariah the son of Shaphan, urge the king not to burn it but he "would not hear them." On the contrary, he commands some men to arrest Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet; 'but the Lord hid them.'

Jehoiakim had not listened to Jeremiah when on several occasions he had spoken to him. Now he rejects the inspired Word, written upon the roll, and destroys it. How tragic it will be for those who, after hearing the gospel of grace, voluntarily reject it. "Of how much worse punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and esteemed the blood of the covenant ... common, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:29).

All through the centuries Satan has tried relentlessly, but in vain, to destroy the Bible. God has seen to it that the Word should be safely preserved up to our own days. Throughout Israel's dispersion since the destruction of Jerusalem, the Scriptures have been preserved, copied again and again, and transmitted. In the early years of Christianity the fierce persecutions against the Christians failed to do away with the copies of the Scriptures. During the centuries faithful copyists transcribed the existing texts with utmost care. At the time of the Reformation the invention of printing allowed mass production of the scriptures which until then had been in the hands of only a few privileged people. A short time later, however, there arose a relentless pursuit of everyone who possessed a Bible. How tenacious the efforts to destroy the Scriptures as well as its readers! Even today vast areas of the world can receive Bibles and New Testaments only in very small quantities at one time. In spite of all, "the Word of God is not bound." Through the art of printing, through all the means that God uses to spread the Scriptures, the Bible is more widely distributed today than ever. It has been translated in whole or in part into thousands of languages and dialects. Devoted men and women persevere in this task. God uses available technology to spread His Word everywhere and thus enable a constantly increasing number of people to come into contact with it.

Satan uses other expedients in order to discredit the Scripture. He spreads doubts ("Has God really spoken?" - Genesis 3:1-24) or promotes the idea that the Bible contains the Word of God, but is not the Word of God, as some theologians state. Others employ human reasoning, supposedly to explain the Bible. Some strike passages out of it, others add to it, and still others warp or pretend to edit it. But God watches over His Word. He brings about the salvation of those that receive it by faith, and it provides food and edification to God's elect. "Every Scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness ... Proclaim the Word; be urgent in season and out of season, convict, rebuke, encourage with all long suffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Timothy 4:2). At all times, in every place and under every condition the Word is available to us. It operates in the souls of men as the Sword of the Spirit; as a fire and a hammer; as the source of life; as joy and light.

Jeremiah was deeply affected when he learned of the destruction of the roll that had required so much effort to write. Once more his ministry has been rejected. The word of the Lord, however, comes to him, “Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned” (Jeremiah 36:28).

Jeremiah and his friend set to work again to duplicate the destroyed scroll “and there were added besides unto them many like words” (Jeremiah 36:32). The Lord Jesus Himself said, “Heaven and the earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away” (Mark 13:31).

Baruch took deeply to heart what he was writing. Oppressed by fear, he could not sleep and grew weary with his sorrow and grief (Jeremiah 45:3). One day while he is writing, Jeremiah interrupts his dictation and tells his friend that the Lord, the God of Israel, has a special message for him; everything will be overthrown in the entire land; evil will come upon all flesh, “But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go” (Jeremiah 45:5). Thus Baruch obtained the assurance that his life would be spared. On the basis of this promise, he could take to heart the exhortation given him, “And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them.”

We, too, know that frightful judgments will come upon this world. However, we live in the hope that before they break loose, the Lord will return to take away His own. This is an even greater consolation than the one given to Baruch.

#### Thinking Things Through

1. What lessons for your own life can you learn from the close relationship between Jeremiah and Baruch as friends and co-laborers?
2. Imagine Baruch's feelings when the king destroyed in a few seconds the scroll which he had diligently worked on for many days and months. How do the king's actions illustrate the efforts of Satan throughout the centuries to destroy the Word of God?
3. Notice the little word to a discouraged Baruch, “Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them.” Compare with the Lord's words about discipleship in Luke 9:23-26.

## 2.06. Chapter 6 - The Choice

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Chapter 6 - The Choice At the end of the history of the prophet's activities, two choices present themselves - one for Jeremiah, the other for the people. Jeremiah can go to Babylon or remain in the land. The remnant of the people left in Judah by Nebuchadnezzar may stay there or go down to Egypt.

### 1. Jeremiah's Choice (Jeremiah 39:10-14; Jeremiah 40:1-6)

After a frightful siege of eighteen months, Zedekiah flees from Jerusalem. The Chaldean army pursues him and overtakes him and his companions in the plains of Jericho. At Riblah, in Nebuchadnezzar's presence, Zedekiah's sons are slaughtered before his eyes. All the nobles of Judah are put to death. Zedekiah's eyes are put out; he is bound with chains of brass and carried to Babylon. "And the Chaldeans burned the king's house and the houses of the people with fire, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 39:8). The rest of Judah, including those that had deserted to the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, are carried away captive to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar had given special orders as to Jeremiah: "Keep an eye upon him and do him no harm; but do unto him even as he shall say unto you." The captain of the body-guard takes him out of the court of the guard. Yet, through an unaccountable error, he is bound with chains and found among the captives being transported to Babylon. The captain of the body-guard discovers him and delivers him from his chains. He invites him to go along to Babylon, where he would keep his eye upon him, and adds, "But if it seems wrong for you to come with me to Babylon, remain here. See, all the land is before you; wherever it seems good and convenient for you to go, go there" (Jeremiah 40:4).

Jeremiah is now reaching the end of his public ministry. He is probably at least sixty years old. Two choices are placed before him. He may go to Babylon where he will be able to enjoy the king's favors; where he will find his friends Daniel, Ezekiel, and other captives carried away on a previous occasion; and where he will be able to spend the rest of his life in relative tranquillity. On the other hand, he may remain with the poor of the land in Palestine and exercise a ministry among them. It will probably not find a better acceptance than his previous prophesying, but will nevertheless provide, on God's part, a last encouragement for these desolate remains of Israel. The Word of God speaks of several choices. Abraham, satisfied with the territory that Lot would not choose, invites his nephew to make his choice first. Instead of leaving the first choice to his uncle, Lot lifts up his eyes and looks at the plain of Sodom. We know the rest of his life. As for Moses, the Epistle to the Hebrews confirms that through faith he chose "rather to suffer affliction along with the people of God than to have the temporary pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25). Solomon does not ask for glory and riches, but for the wisdom necessary to carry out in the interests of the people the royal responsibilities that God had entrusted to him (2 Chronicles 1:7-12). Mary "has chosen the good part, that which shall not be taken from her," the place at the feet of Jesus. In the life of every Christian many choices arise, some more important than others. Nebuzar-adan says to Jeremiah: "See all the land is before you; wherever it seems good and

convenient for you to go, go there.” Doesn’t a young man face virtually the same situation when he is about to choose a career or a profession? At the end of his high school or college years various alternatives are offered to him. Which is the path that the Lord wants for him? His parents may advise him; an experienced brother may express his opinion; yet it remains the young believer’s responsibility to decide with the help of the Lord how he will spend the main part of his life.

Still more important is the choice of a wife. How necessary to continually pray for the Lord’s guidance - that He might lead each of us to that special one of whom He can say, “I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18).

Finally, as to a place of fellowship, many believers are faced with the problem of choosing among several. Should they remain where they have been brought up? What a privilege if they become convinced that the place where they already meet is the place where the Lord Jesus gathers His redeemed around Himself! Other believers, however, are called upon to discern where the Lord wants to lead them, so that they might be found in His presence with His own. On these three choices hang “the issues of life” - choices that are not made in the head, but in the heart - in true dependence on the Lord as our faithful Friend.

Jeremiah remains silent; “he had not yet given an answer.” Nebuzar-adan no doubt expects him to gratefully welcome the attractive offer to settle in Babylon. From the silence of the prophet he concludes that the proposal is not accepted and so encourages Jeremiah to go to Gedaliah, or “wherever it seems good and convenient for you to go” (Jeremiah 40:5). He gives him provisions and a gift, and sends him away. Jeremiah comes to Gedaliah and abides “with him among the people that remained in the land.” He prefers to stay with the poor of the people of God in their destitution rather than to enjoy the favors of the king of Babylon. Perhaps there is not much to attract one in one’s own meeting - not many spiritual gifts, not an abundance of warm fellowship. If however, the Lord through His presence fulfills His promise to be in the midst of two or three gathered unto His name, is it not the place where one should stay, and (in dependence upon Him) endeavor to contribute some spiritual blessing?

## 2. The Choice of the People

Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, had been appointed governor over the cities of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. For a few months this grandson of the scribe is a good governor. Those Jews who had fled to the surrounding countries return with full confidence to the land of Judah and gather wine and summer fruits in great abundance (Jeremiah 40:12)

Jealousy, however, will spoil everything. A certain man of royal blood named Ishmael evidently thought that he should have been appointed governor. And so he kills Gedaliah along with all the Jews with him and the Chaldean men of war that had been left there by the king of Babylon. He then takes the survivors with him intending to go to the land of Ammon (Jeremiah 41:10). However, Johanan and the captains of the forces that were with him free the captives from Ishmael, who flees to Baalis the king of the children of Ammon. Johanan and those whom he has delivered seek refuge for a time in the inn of Chimham at Bethlehem, waiting for the opportunity to flee secretly into Egypt, for fear of the Chaldeans.

We do not know how Jeremiah happens to be in that place. But Johanan and those with him ask him to pray for them in order that “The Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we should

walk, and the thing that we should do.” Now these men had already decided in the depths of their hearts to go down to Egypt. Their whole hope was that Jeremiah would confirm their secret purpose. The prophet promises that he would pray, “and it shall come to pass that whatsoever things the Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you” (Jeremiah 42:4). These men then promise to “hearken to the voice of the Lord,” whatever the answer will be. To choose first and then to pray - is this not a trap set by Satan before many a child of God? This is especially so when one’s heart is already committed to marry a person outside the will of God. Perhaps the person is unconverted or walking in a path where true Christian fellowship is not possible. Or perhaps this person will entice the believing partner into a worldly lifestyle. Whatever the reason, the person does not answer to the will of God for His own.

Advice is sought from one’s parents or possibly from an experienced brother: the situation is explained and prayer is requested. They raise again the question of the will of God and point to the dangers involved in such a marriage. However, the heart has already decided and will not turn back. Similar situations arise in matters other than marriage. How important to acquire the habit of seeking the Lord before making decisions in one’s heart. Then it will be natural to turn first to our well-known Friend in the decisive hours of life.

Ten days elapse before the answer comes to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 42:7). This allows time to reflect on the hypocrisy of asking prayer for direction. Then he gives them God’s definite answer: “If you will still abide in this land, then will I build you ... and I will plant you ... Be not afraid of the king of Babylon ... for I will be with you to save you ... and I will grant mercy to you.” If you go into Egypt, where you think you will see neither war nor famine, it is precisely there that they will follow hard after you. “The Lord has said concerning you, the remnant of Judah, ‘Go ye not into Egypt.’” The advice is clear. But since Johanan and his companions had already reached their decision, they quickly respond, “You speak falsely! The Lord our God has not sent you to say, ‘Do not go to Egypt to sojourn there’” (Jeremiah 43:2).

Deeds follow these words. Johanan gathers all those left in the land - “men, women, and children, and the king’s daughters. and every person that Nebuzar-adan ... had left with Gedaliah ... and they came into the land of Egypt: for they hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord.

Throughout his life Jeremiah has seen his prophecies rejected and his warnings despised. Now it has happened again. Nevertheless, he follows the people into Egypt and even there warns them by the Word of the Lord (Jeremiah 43:8-13). But all is in vain. They reply to him, “As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you, but we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth” (Jeremiah 44:16-17). The prophet, rejected and despised like his Master will be, apparently finishes his days in that land of exile. No details are given in the Word. His end is as sad as his lonely life had been. Later, John the Baptist will finish his course in a similar way - put into prison and then beheaded.

Such servants have been eminently faithful, even unto death, They had their moments of weakness, but in the day of rewards their crown will be glorious. To the end, they have answered the call which God addressed to them in their youth.

Jerusalem has been destroyed, its walls torn down, the temple set on fire, the people slaughtered or transported into exile; the history of Israel seems to finish in blood and tears. But seventy years

later a remnant will come back and rebuild the temple and the wall. Their descendants will sink deeply into legalism and traditionalism. When the promised Messiah comes among them, He is rejected. Once more Jerusalem is destroyed and the people scattered throughout the world. In our days we see how their “dry bones” are beginning to move and come together. Albeit the breath of the Lord will not come upon them until they acknowledge their Messiah (Ezekiel 37:1-28).

However, this “people terrible from their beginning and hitherto; a nation of continued waiting and of treading down, whose land the rivers have spoiled,” has continued to exist in an extraordinary way down through the centuries. The branches cut out of the olive tree will be “grafted in” again (Romans 11:23) “in order that they also may be objects of mercy” (Romans 11:31).

Above man’s acts of disobedience, rebellion and ingratitude; above his wretchedness and accumulated ruin, there abides the supreme resource enshrined at the end of the book of Lamentations. “YOU, O LORD, REMAIN FOREVER” (Lamentations 5:19; Hebrews 1:11).

### Thinking Things Through

1. Consider some of the factors which would cause Jeremiah to remain with the poor of the land after the rest had been carried away captive to Babylon. Thinking of an important choice you have made recently, what were the underlying motives which caused you to decide as you did?
2. Jeremiah’s choice did not make life easier for him, nor give him ease and pleasure in his declining years. How did the wrong choices made by others adversely affect him? To what extent are we affected by the decisions of others such as family, friends, assembly, etc.?
3. Thinking back over this study in the life of Jeremiah, what is the most important lesson for your own life that you have learned from it?

\* The book that bears this title is primarily concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem and the persecutions that Jeremiah himself suffered.

\* These verses, like many others also, have a prophetic bearing on God’s judgment with respect to His people and His heritage.

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