

- **\*READ I Corinthians 10:11,12\*** Here in **Corinthians 10:1-12**, the Apostle Paul is seeking to admonish these brethren in Corinth to greater and sustained faithfulness by reminding them of the failures of their forefathers of Israel. He reminds them of their complaining and rebellion against God in the wilderness that resulted in them being killed by snakes and decimated by the destroyer. The section I want to key in on is **vv.11,12** which read, *"These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall."*
- The message from Paul is simple: Learn from the mistakes of these people so that you don't make the same mistakes yourselves! But my question is this: What was the greatest mistake that these people made? I believe the answer to this question can be found in the text in **v.6**, *"Now these things took place as examples for us, so that we will not desire evil things as they did."* Their greatest mistake was in their desires to do that which was evil. These people had been rescued from generations of slavery in Egypt, and instead of looking and walking forward with God towards the promised land, they allowed for their desires to rest upon that which was evil and contrary to God.
- Maybe worst of all...they actually desired to go back to that place from which they had just been rescued. These slaves who had been liberated from bondage actually desired to return to their house of bondage. They were often found desiring to return back to Egypt. If you're like me then you are left confusingly scratching your head. How could it be possible for these people to actually desire to return to Egypt? I believe this is a very valid question, and we are going to work through some of the difficulties that Israel faced in the Egypt to determine why they desired Egypt and what lessons we can learn from their mistakes and failures.

## I. While in the wilderness, Israel:

### A. was often dissatisfied with their current circumstances

1. The dissatisfaction of the people of Israel was most often seen in their grumblings and complaining against God and His servant Moses. In fact, the dissatisfaction within the hearts of the people of Israel shows its ugly face while they are still within Egypt! That first complaint against God and His plan is the first in a list of 13-14 times (depending on how you count) that we find such complaining within the story of Israel's liberation and treks in the wilderness.
- 1) **Exodus 5** — As Moses is dealing with Pharaoh on behalf of Israel, Pharaoh takes offense at their requests to allow the Israelites to go out to worship the Lord. He retaliates by making their work more difficult by not supplying the straw that was needed. The people find out that this command to make their work more difficult was a result of Moses and Aaron coming to Pharaoh so they rebuke them for their efforts.
- 2) **Exodus 14** — After their being liberated from Egypt, Pharaoh regrets letting the Israelites go, so he gathers 600 of his best chariots so he can chase them down. The Israelites see Pharaoh and his army coming. They were fearful and respond by complaining to Moses as to why he brought them out to the wilderness to be killed.
- 3) **Exodus 15:22-24** — After three days without water, the multitude finally finds water, but it is bitter. They grumble against Moses and name the place Marah.
- 4) **Exodus 16:1-3** — Two and a half months after departing Egypt, the people grumble against Moses and Aaron by stating that they were about to starve while they had pots of meat and bread beyond measure in Egypt.
- 5) **Exodus 17:1-3** — As the people of Israel made camp at Rephidim, they found there to be no water, so they complained to Moses and Moses turns around and complains to God.
- 6) **Exodus 32** — As Moses is on Mount Sinai receiving the Law from the Lord, the people complain about Moses's absence, and they seek to create their own god out of gold.

- 7) **Numbers 11** — God had provided the people with an abundance of food in the form of manna which was collected and made into cakes. However, some among the people started to complain about the lack of variety of food, and it greatly angered the Lord.
  - 8) **Numbers 12** — Miriam & Aaron complain against Moses serving as the main leader of the people even though God also used them in various ways.
  - 9) **Numbers 14** — The children of Israel were terrified of the gigantic people that inhabited Canaan, and they cried out against the Lord for bringing them out of Egypt just to be killed. They even go so far as to start putting effort into appointing another leader who would take them back down to Egypt.
  - 10) **Numbers 16** — Korah and 50 other prominent men rebel against Moses's leadership.
  - 11) **Numbers 16:41** — After Korah and the other insurrectionists are punished for their sins, some of the people stand against Moses and blame him for their deaths.
  - 12) **Numbers 20:1-5** — The people once again complained about there being a lack of water. This time it was as they settled in the area of Kadesh.
  - 13) **Numbers 21:1-9** — The last instance of the people complaining comes after a strong victory over the Canaanite king of Arad. The defeat the king with the Lord's help, but then they turn around and become impatient with the journey that the Lord had them on. For their complaints, the Lord sent poisonous snakes out among the people.
2. It might seem crazy to us that these people would be so quick to complain against God after everything He had done for them, but it is obvious that these people were not able to see beyond what was right in front of them. Instead of being thankful for what they did have and what was awaiting them in the future, they only complained and even went a step further by wanting to go back to Egypt!
- B. desired to return to Egypt, the land where they believed they had all their needs fulfilled.**
1. It can be easy for us to look at our present difficulties and allow for them to cause a little "revisionist history" to take hold within our minds, and that clearly seems to be what was going on with these people. They took their present difficulties and allowed for them to make the past look like it was something desirable!
    - 1) *"It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness."* (**Exodus 14:12**)
    - 2) *"The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!'"* (**Exodus 16:3**)
    - 3) *"But the people thirsted there for water and grumbled against Moses. They said, 'Why did you ever bring us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?'"* (**Exodus 17:3**)
    - 4) *"The riffraff among them had a strong craving for other food. The Israelites wept again and said, 'Who will feed us meat? We remember the free fish we ate in Egypt, along with the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now our appetite is gone; there's nothing to look at but this manna!'"* (**Numbers 11:4-6**)
    - 5) *"All the Israelites complained about Moses and Aaron, and the whole community told them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land to die by the sword? Our wives and children will become plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?' So they said to one another, 'Let's appoint a leader and go back to Egypt.'"* (**Numbers 14:2-4**)
    - 6) *"There was no water for the community, so they assembled against Moses and Aaron. The people quarreled with Moses and said, 'If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord. Why have you brought the Lord's assembly into this wilderness for us and our livestock to die here? Why have you led us up from Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It's not a place of grain, figs, vines, and pomegranates, and there is no water to drink!'"* (**Numbers 20:2-5**)

7) *"Then they set out from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea to bypass the land of Edom, but the people became impatient because of the journey. The people spoke against God and Moses: "Why have you led us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread or water, and we detest this wretched food!"* (**Numbers 21:4,5**)

2. They continually compared their present circumstances to that which they now perceived was their reality while in Egypt. And while it might have been true that they had plenty of food to eat while in Egypt, the reality is that they were quickly forgetting what else was a part of their reality while they were living in Egypt.

## II. But they had forgotten:

### A. they were abused slaves while in Egypt.

1. While the beginnings of the people in Egypt were good and memorable, and while they were being abundantly fruitful and multiplying in the land of Egypt...the Bible tells us that there eventually arose a king who did not know Joseph and his great works of service that he had given to the nation of Egypt. In **Exodus 1:8-14**, we can read of this new king being worried about these Israelite people because they were *"more numerous and powerful than we are."* His fear centered around the thought that if a war broke out then the children of Israel would rise up against Egypt and gain their freedom. His solution was to deal harshly with the people so that they would know their place as slaves to the Egyptians. Unfortunately for this new king, the hard labor caused them to grow even more and the Egyptians came to loathe the Israelites for their resilience and strength.
2. When the harsh labor didn't quite work out, the king then took things a step further by killing the male children in hopes of cutting down on the number of men who might be able to fight against them in war. (**Exodus 1:15-22**) Thankfully, some Hebrew midwives were able to work in such a way that many babies were spared, and the king's plot was foiled.
3. This was the true reality of what the Israelites had lived through as slaves in Egypt, and yet they were so disenchanted by what they faced in the wilderness that they desired to even go back to this life of absolute slavery and harsh treatment. What makes this even more baffling is that they obviously seemed to not think about the fact that God was leading them to a great land.

### B. God was taking them to a great land which had been promised to their ancestors.

1. While it might not have been the most enjoyable existence, the reality is that the time spent in Egypt was just enough time for the people of Israel to grow into a strong and numerous nation. After 430 years spent in Egypt (**Exodus 12:40**), it is reasonable to estimate that they had grown into a nation of over two million people based upon the number of able bodied fighting men being at about 600,000. (**Exodus 12:37**) They had come to Egypt as only a small group of seventy, and they had grown into this mighty nation that God had promised their forefather Abraham that they would become. (**Genesis 12:2**)
2. With this promise having been kept, the people should've had full confidence that God would be able to fulfill the other promises that He had made to Abraham. God even took the time to expressly state that He was looking to free them in order to take them to this great land of promise. *"Therefore tell the Israelites: I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from the forced labor of the Egyptians and rescue you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from the forced labor of the Egyptians. I will bring you to the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord."* (**Exodus 6:6-8**) The Lord reaffirmed His promise to these people, and they even saw the overflowing greatness of the land...and yet they refused to remember the power of God. They only desired for those evil things. We must be better, and we can be better by remembering what they constantly forgot.

### III. We must remember:

#### A. our past lives of sin are enough and only had us on a road to hell.

1. In this discussion, we must recognize that our Egypt is that past time in our lives when we were enslaved to the sin that we lived in. While living in sin apart from God, we were obeying the will of Satan within our lives and he was our master. The end of such living would've been eternal death through separation from God. **(Romans 6:23)** However, upon our obedience to the Gospel the truths of Paul's words in **Romans 6:6,7** became a reality within our own lives. *"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died is freed from sin."*
2. If we have been freed from sin by God's grace through our obedience to the Gospel **(Romans 6:17)**, then we need to embrace the reality that the time that we spend engaged in those sinful practices are more than sufficient for this lifetime. *"Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same understanding—because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin—in order to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God's will. For there has already been enough time spent in doing what the Gentiles choose to do: carrying on in unrestrained behavior, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and lawless idolatry."* **(1 Peter 4:1-3)**

#### B. God desires to lead us to a better eternal home of promise.

1. Even though each of us has spent time in Egypt in the bondage of sin, God desires for our liberation to be able to go on to a much better destination. We have been freed so that we might go on to our own promised land. The Israelites failed because they were not focused on the long game. They saw only the here and now, and when their present circumstances were less than ideal, they began to grumble and complain. They weren't able to see the fact that these less than ideal circumstances were only temporary. They might not have had all of their desires supplied during the time of their wilderness wanderings, but they had to endure the process before they could enter into the true promised rest.
2. Likewise, we are going through the process of overcoming this world, its broken nature, and temptations so that we might be able to lay hold of what God has promised for the faithful... eternity with Him! I think about Jesus's words to His Apostles in **John 14:1-7** where Jesus speaks of going to prepare a place for His people to be able to join Him in eternity. Yes, Jesus has gone on before us, and we are left here, but we have been left so that we might prepare ourselves to go and be with Him.
3. We must adopt the same type of mentality that earned Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob places in the great chapter of faith in **Hebrews 11:8-16**. The text clearly shows us that these people were convinced that there was a place far better awaiting them in the future if they would remain faithful to God. They were looking forward to that city whose architect and builder is God. **(v.10)** They confess that they were foreigners and only temporary residents here on earth. **(v.13)** They were seeking a homeland, a better place, a heavenly one. God was not ashamed to call Himself their God because they were living by faith. **(vv.14,16)** However, notice that the Hebrew writer states that they could've returned to where they can come from **(v.15)**...but they had no interest in doing such a thing because they recognized that any temporary dissatisfaction would be turned into a reward beyond all measure in that eternal home of glory prepared by God.

Whose example will we follow? Will we be like the Israelites and forget the promises of God in order to give effort to go back to a sinful past? Or will we be like the faithful of the Bible who forsook this present world in order to strive for that promised land of rest? I hope that each of us will allow our pasts to remain in the past, so that we might strive to only move forward desiring to obtain the precious promises that have been extended to us by our loving heavenly Father.