

It's been often said that *God's way is not for sissies*, and the plight of the Israelites as they began their journey to the *Promised Land* is a perfect example. As we saw the last time, the children of Israel left Goshen as slaves, with a slave mentality. They wanted freedom, but they were not ready for freedom. So God sent them into the Red Sea . . .

<sup>ESV</sup> Exodus 14:15 The LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.

That started a process that, if they would simply trust God, would lead them not only to freedom, but also to peace and security. They went in as slaves and came out the other side free men. They were in essence "born again". They were totally new to the way of life God was getting ready to give them, a way that included living within the *words of life*<sup>1</sup> that only Israel had. Since their situation was so much like ours today, especially those who are new to the walk and just beginning their *Salvation Cycle*, it's good for us to see how God led them, and what they experienced.

After crossing the sea, God didn't lead them directly to the Promised Land, instead He led them by way of the wilderness . . .

<sup>ESV</sup> Exodus 13:17-18 <sup>17</sup> When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." <sup>18</sup> But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.

Let's think about it for a minute. The distance from the Nile delta to Gaza is 80 – 100 miles . . . a three to four day journey through the desert, yet we know that just three days from seeing the waters of the Sea split in two, the Israelites had begun to complain, thinking that God had led them in the wilderness to die of thirst. Just think if they had made it to the borders of the land just to be confronted by the Philistines! They would have surely returned to the "safety" of Egypt. That's just the way they were. Even though they now had their freedom, deep inside, they were still slaves. Never before had they needed to worry about food, water, and security – the Egyptians had provided that for them. All they had to do is work!

So God led them a different way, by a different path, a way that was designed to teach them more about Himself. God was going to show them that providing food and water was child's play. What they really needed was a relationship, a bond built on love and commitment between themselves and their God (something they could never have in Egypt), and a concern for the wellbeing of their neighbor. He also wanted them to see that by trusting in Him, they had the ability to conquer their enemies and never become slaves again. Instead of taking them directly to the Promised Land, God sent them on a *journey*. Let's take a look at that journey.

The first thing we want to notice is that God didn't give Israel the Ten Words<sup>2</sup> while they were still camped on the banks of the Red Sea. He didn't say "If you are going to be my people, you must do . . . such and such". He didn't tell them to take up 10% of the spoils or anything like that and give it to the priests. He didn't teach them about sacrifices, He didn't even tell them about the Sabbath until weeks after the Red Sea crossing. They simply were not ready for it. If God had dumped His entire code of instructions on them without them being completely confident in Him, they would have surely turned back to Egypt. Yes – I know they were given some instructions while still in Egypt, and I'm sure they had a general idea of what it took to please YHVH, but for the most part God had yet to give them His code of instructions and laws. Instead of giving them laws, He gave them a cloud by day and a light by night to follow, something they could follow. By following *the way* He was going to lead them, they could see that YHWH was different from the Egyptian gods. Not until they saw that

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 32:46-47

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew text actually says *ten words*, not ten commandments, though we understand them to be ten general laws pertaining to how we are to love YHVH and each other.

YHVH, this new god of theirs, truly did have their best interest in mind, could they really appreciate and follow His law.

The Hebrew word for *way* is **derek** דֶּרֶךְ (Strong's 1870). In order to say *the way* in Hebrew, you would say *ha-derek*. The word simply means a *journey* or a *going*, and it comes from the verb root *dawrak* which means to tread, as if you were treading grapes – lifting your feet with each step and noticeably shoving them down with each step. To tread on something is to do it with purposes, as in . . .

Malachi 4:2-3 <sup>2</sup> But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. <sup>3</sup> And ye shall **tread down the wicked**; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.

So this journey that God had sent Israel on was not to be just a casual walk. They were to set out on a *journey* with purpose! And God didn't waste any time revealing His purpose to them.

Just three days journey from the sea, they came to Marah

understand that, at least most of us do. But the Israelites didn't understand it. They didn't know how unprepared they were to walk the walk of free people serving a benevolent king. So, as the journey drew on, they got discouraged and wanted to go back to Egypt – to slavery. Thankfully, God was merciful and led them gently. Through their trials and victories, He was able to reveal himself to them, and to keep them from becoming too discouraged, He revealed His laws to them bit by bit, a little at a time.

If we are to follow the Exodus example, we should realize that as one is *coming into* this walk, he should do so slowly. Walking in God's way isn't hard, but it is different, and God doesn't dump it on us all at once. Instead, He wants us to discover the ancient paths that have been hidden from us and build on them . . .

Jeremiah 6:16 <sup>16</sup> Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

Instead of jumping in all at once, it's better to ease in, fully understanding what you're doing. With what seems like so many laws, it's easy to get discouraged. People tend to compare themselves with others who seemingly have such a better walk – no Sabbath issues, better behaved children, no financial issues. They sometimes think they're never doing it good enough – they will never measure up. Then, of course, there's the thought that "I'm so new to this, there's so much catching up to do, so I want to do it all!"

Joseph Good once told the story of a young Jewish man who was very learned in the scripture but who wanted to get a feeling for where he stood with God. So the man went to his rabbi, and in order to hide his true intent, told this story to the rabbi. He said; "Rabbi, there is a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, and on the ladder are three men. One man is very low on the ladder, only on the first rung. Another man is halfway up the ladder, and the third is almost to the top." He then went on to ask; "Rabbi, which man is more pleasing to God?". The rabbi thought for a moment then responded; "I cannot answer that question – you did not give me enough information." "What more information can I give you?"; the young man exclaimed. "Simply this"; said the rabbi, "Which direction are the men on the ladder going? For the one who is most pleasing to God is the one who is moving up the ladder".

The point is this - it's not where you are in the walk that's important, it's where you are headed. If you learn something new, become convicted of it, then walk in it, God is happy. Anytime we backslide, or are happy with our current condition, God is not pleased. Turning back is never an option.

Along with that point is the matter of rabbinic Judaism. People come into this walk<sup>4</sup> from different backgrounds and vantage points, but in practically every case, they come in contact with the teachings of the rabbis. The question always comes up concerning the code of Jewish law commonly referred to as *Oral Torah*. Should a person new to this way subscribe to the Oral Torah, and if so . . . how much? A good answer to those questions might be found by looking at all the laws God gave Israel while on the way from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai . . . all ONE of them. Yes, God gave Israel only one law on their journey - it concerned the Sabbath. God gave it Moses orally, but even though this law was given orally, He backed it up with clear, visible signs. There was no question as to whether the law applied to them or not.

Another thing that causes people to abandon the journey and turn back to Egypt is the matter of interpretation of God's laws and statutes. "What's permissible on the Sabbath", "how much should I tithe", "should I tithe", and of course . . . the very divisive issue of determining the beginning of the months. These are all good questions, especially for those new to the walk, and Israel was NEW to the walk!. So knowing how divisive differences in opinion pertaining to application of Torah can be, God provided a solution, a way to preserve peace in the camp. His solution was the judges. We'll spend some time here analyzing these scriptures.

Exodus 18:13-16 <sup>13</sup> And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. <sup>14</sup> So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?" <sup>15</sup> And Moses said to his father-in-

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<sup>4</sup> I'm differentiating the "Hebrew Roots" walk from the modern "Sabbath Christian" walk adopted by many Sabbath keeping organizations (many of which are offshoots from the former World Wide Church of God), the major difference being that most people in the Hebrew Roots groups do not subscribe to the belief that the "church" replaced Israel. Instead, they believe that the "church" IS Israel, and thus the Jewish people are their brothers.

law, "Because the people come to me to inquire (d'rash - דָּרַשׁ darash) of God. <sup>16</sup> "When they have a difficulty (dabar – word דְּבָר ) they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws (torah)."

This passage has always been explained to me this way . . . there were people who were arguing with each other about who owned a certain gold platter, or maybe one person accused another of damaging his ox-cart . . . secular things. But maybe there's more than what meets the *English* reading eye. The Hebrew word for *inquire* in this passage is *d'rash*, which means *seek*. This is the root from which we get the word *midrash*, a word that indicates searching the scriptures to gain understanding, then to discuss or even debate what you've learned<sup>5</sup>. Instead of disputes over material things, maybe the Israelites, by the time they got to the mountain, were truly seeking to understand this god, YHVH, who had done so many marvelous things for them. Maybe they were really interested in understanding His law.

This same passage seems a little clearer when read from the Septuagint -

<sup>LXE</sup> Exodus 18:16 For whenever there is a dispute among them, and they come to me, I give judgment upon each, and I teach them the ordinances of God and his law.

It's clear that the people wanted to know what God had to say in regards to Torah, but Moses was unable to answer all their questions – there just wasn't enough time . . . Let's read on –

Exodus 18:17-20 <sup>17</sup> So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. <sup>18</sup> "Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. <sup>19</sup> "Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the *difficulties* (dabar) to God. <sup>20</sup> "And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and *show them the way in which they must walk* (what we might today call *halacha*) and the work they must do.

Jethro's solution was a way for Moses to, in essence bring the questions (about the Torah and the Torah walk) to God without having to inquire of God himself - at least in the small matters. As a result, Moses would be teaching the people the true essence of Torah. Continuing on -

<sup>ESV</sup> Exodus 18:21-23 <sup>21</sup> Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. <sup>22</sup> And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. <sup>23</sup> If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace (shalom)."

God's solution to disputes over God's way was the JUDGES. The way I read this, it appears that the same type of matters that were to be brought to the judges, would also be brought to Moses, i.e. – matters of Torah and the Torah walk could be decided by Moses in some cases, or by the judges in other cases. It basically depended on who was affected. If there was a question about the Torah walk within a clan, a group of ten (households), that question would be decided by the judge. If another clan had the same question, their judge might come to a different conclusion, and that appears to have been OK with God. It was not until the multiple groups of 10 clans interacted that the judge of 50 would make a decision that was binding on those 50 clans.

This seems to be the remedy God provided to Israel when it came to questions about Torah, but how can we apply that today? How can someone new to this walk know what God expects when there seems to be so much confusion? I submit that the proper thing to do, the way that would provide *shalom* to the individual and the group whenever there is a **question** about what the Torah says, and the **answer is not obvious** through earnest study, is to follow the judge or the ones given the responsibility of the group. It's not our fault that some things are confusing. God certainly knows our heart when we strive to walk in His way. He is not a God of confusion, but He is a god of shalom.

One thing we find missing in the journey the Israelites took from the sea to the mountain was a call for Israel to *believe in God*, at least not in the way we think of belief. In our Greek way of thinking, to believe in someone

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<sup>5</sup> See Isaiah 34:16

or something is to acknowledge their existence or what they may have, done . . . sort of a warm and fuzzy feeling. In Hebrew, believing is **supporting through your actions**. The Hebrew word for believe is *aman*. Aman is a root word, and like most Hebrew root words, it is a verb. As an action word, It carries the sense of propping up or supporting as when a mother nurses her child. It's the same word from which we get *faith* and *faithfulness (emunah)*, as well as *amen*. Thus, to believe means that you support – through your actions – the thing, doctrine, or person you “believe in”. God required Israel to act on their belief by supporting Him and His servant Moses. When it comes to our walk, I don't think God is as concerned about what we believe as He is with what we do with what we believe. I would suspect that some of the Israelites believed God was fire while others believed God was a cloud, then later they probably all thought God was a mountain. It didn't really matter as long as they followed the words that were coming from whatever way God chose to manifest himself.

The way, the derek of God is a good walk. It's not a stroll, not a walk in the park. It's an intentional treading, each step along the way filled with purpose and hope. As we study and learn more about the Torah of God, we learn more about the character and purpose of our Messiah. Learning and studying about God and Messiah Yeshua is part of our Salvation Cycle. Through the pages of the Bible, we see the steadfastness and love of God, and by doing so, we grow in confidence and faith, as well as strength to overcome the deceiver.

One last thing about the word *derek*. We can derive the original intent of the word from the pictographic meaning of each individual letter. The word is spelled dalet (door, pathway), resh (head, supreme, first) and kaf (open hand, palm, or wing) The pictographic meaning of *derek* is “the door (path) a person covers”<sup>6</sup>. We remember that the Israelites had just a few days earlier passed through a door that was covered with blood. God also said to Israel “. . . I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself”<sup>7</sup>. Their journey started when they walked in the house through that blood covered door. It continued the next morning when they began the march toward the Red Sea, finally stopping for a few months at Mount Sinai. From the moment they left Egypt they were covered by the cloud. We, the people of God, the descendants of Jacob can rest assured that as long as we're seeking God, our path is covered.

Isaiah 51:15-16 <sup>5</sup> But I am the LORD your God, Who divided the sea whose waves roared -- The LORD of hosts is His name. <sup>16</sup> And I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, That I may plant the heavens, Lay the foundations of the earth, And say to Zion, 'You are My people.'

Shalom Alechiem

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<sup>6</sup> Hebrew Word Pictures, Dr. Frank Seekins, pg. 158

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 19:4