

Why God Allows

Temptation

A Scripture-based guide for dealing with Temptation

This study is an attempt at giving a clear answer to the question of "Why Does God Allow Temptation?" It views temptation not as something to be avoided, but as an integral part of God's plan – based on an explanation of temptation on the "*Law of the Four P's*" that states that God gives us a PROMISE that is linked to a PRINCIPLE (or condition), followed by a PROBLEM (temptation), leading to a PROVISION. Temptation, therefore, is the point of which man decides whether or not to obey God's Word and receive the consequent provision.

Many instances from Scripture demonstrate the purpose and principle of temptation and this study seeks to guide the reader toward resisting temptations and accepting God's provision for His followers.

- The Purpose of Temptation Page 2
- God's Promises Are Conditional Page 8
- What is Our Wilderness? Page 12
- The Law of the Four P's Page 18
- What Are We To Do With Problems? Page 22
- Entering Canaan – What is Temptation? Page 25
- Temptation's Delicate Balance Page 28
- What Is The "*Promise Land?*" Page 31
- Temptation and the book of Romans Page 31
- Christ in Temptation Page 40
- The Serpents in the Wilderness Page 51
- How to Possess Our Promise Land Page 55
- What Is Our Promise Land? Page 58
- Our Own Personal Battle Page 61

WHY GOD ALLOWS TEMPTATION!

What is the purpose of temptation?

The Old Testament Prophet Hosea, speaking for God, cried out, “*My people perish for lack of knowledge*” (Hosea 4:6). This concept penetrates the need of God’s people of every generation. The believer *must* be instructed in God’s ways; he *must* come to understand that God works on given principles.

This study is designed to examine God’s ways and learn His principles of operation. It is not a theological discourse on what happened in the Garden of Eden, but hopefully, it will become an instruction manual for understanding temptations. Learning these skills can help us understand Bible truths and bring us into God’s abundant living for the believer.

Our life can be changed! The provisions promised in God’s Word in every realm can be claimed. But they will not come without an element of struggle and temptation, and that is the reason this study has come into being.

Many, like Israel, has left the land Egypt (symbolic of the sinner’s life); they have been converted to Jesus Christ, yet, symbolically, they are wandering in the wilderness, yearning for the Promise Land – “*the land flowing with milk and honey*” – symbolic of the promises of plenty given in God’s Word.

My prayer is that these lessons will bring you step-by-step into your own Promised Land of victory, living a life of triumph over all temptations.



We begin by realizing that God views every temptation as serving an essential purpose in our life. We will see that temptation shows us what we are and where we stand; and it plays an important role in what we will be in the future! Temptation is a factor in the psychological and spiritual growth process everyone must go through if we are to become mature individuals, capable of living a full and meaningful life.

The function of temptation is always to trigger a choice and provoke a definite stand or action. Temptation forces us to make a difficult and important decision. – If we disobey what we know to be the right thing to do and commit an act of disobedience, it becomes easier psychologically to repeat the same choices in the future, however, doing the right thing establishes a pattern for mature and wise decisions in the future.

Temptation is the dividing line between innocence and awareness. Once we face temptation and made a choice of action, we have stepped into a new dimension of reality. If our choice is right – we are blessed. If our choice is wrong – we harm our Christian walk.

Temptations will come into our experience whether we like it or not. They always present a lesson to be learned. Our choice demonstrates whether the lesson is learned or if it must be repeated.

We say to our children, "*Don't cross the busy street alone!*" Temptation comes into play the moment the child is given an opportunity to disobey. There is no one around to see, and the other side of the street beckons, promising adventure. The response to temptation will determine if the child can be trusted to play alone near the street in the future.

How we face temptation affects every area of our personal experience. For us to understand more about the nature of temptation and its definite purpose is of vital importance.

Unfortunately, temptation is one of the most *misunderstood* words in our language. It is thought of as something to be avoided at all cost – something dangerous that will cause much pain or trouble – or something that will surely lead us into wrongdoing.

Temptation *may* lead to these things, but only if we make the definite choice in that direction. Temptation is not the *cause* of trouble or wrongdoing. It just presents us with a choice. To blame my wrongdoing on temptation - (such as saying, "*I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't been tempted!*") – is as ridiculous as saying, "*I wouldn't have gotten a traffic ticket if the light hadn't changed to red just before I got to the intersection.*"

Who was to blame for the ticket – you or the red light? The light only served to present you with a quick choice: Should I stop and obey the law? Or hurry through to save time – and make myself liable to face the consequences? The decision is entirely ours.

Understanding *how* temptation functions will help us face it differently – and can change our lives. When we Christians are honest with ourselves, we are forced to admit that there is a noticeable discrepancy between the Christian life that we read of in God's Word and what we experience in our daily living – (what we – down deep in our hearts – hope it would be). I use the word "*hope*," because it seems that some believers aren't even sure that the Christian life, as taught in the Bible, can be a reality in today's world.

Some explain the discrepancy between the beautiful promises in the Bible and the lives of many Christians by saying that these promises of Christ-like living must refer to heaven. This is "*pie-in-the-sky*" religion, and it doesn't do much to help us solve our problems here and now. Paul refused this kind of escapism when he emphasized the *now* aspect of the Christian life in Romans 5:17:

"The sin of this one man, Adam, cause death to be king over all, but all who will take God's gift of forgiveness and acquittal are kings of life because of this one man, Jesus Christ."

Real Christianity is when Bible promises become reality. This is how God meant it to be. Realizing the abundance of God's promises – without experiencing their fulfillment – should bring us to a place where we refuse to seek another Biblical promises until the ones we already know become functional in our life.

Knowing all the promises in the Bible by memory doesn't make the provisions automatically ours. There are believers who go around quoting, "*There is now no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8:1). Yet, they live under constant condemnation, as if they must carry the guilt of their old sins with them to the grave. There are those who quote Scriptures about having joy in their hearts – and they are the most joyless creatures you could ever meet. And others know all the Scriptures on how we should love each other – however, they live in marriages that are on the verge of breakup, are unable to communicate love to their own children, and have continual difficulties in business relationships.

Can God . . .

- heal the brokenhearted
- effect recovery to the sick
- bring love to the lonely and bitter
- save the lost
- set free those who are in misery
- repair broken relationships?

Can He bring love, joy, and laughter into gray empty lives – make families one in love and spirit?

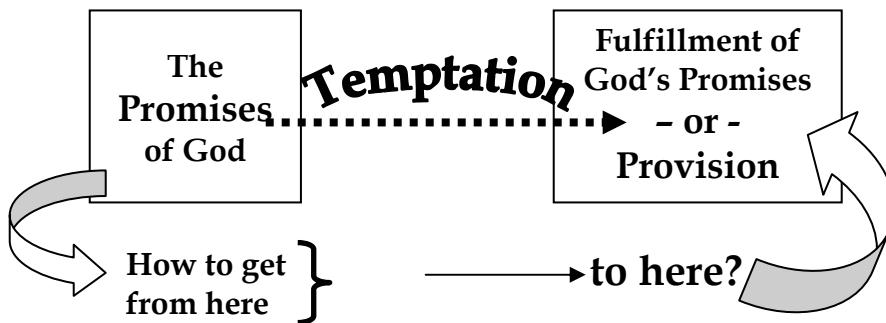
Can He meet our particular need – answer our particular prayer – fulfill the particular promise that we have cherished for years?

Can He – or can't He? Is the Bible true or is it a bunch of fairy tales – just something to comfort us in this world of problems? Is religion a crutch for the weak who cannot face reality?

I believe that the Bible is true – *every word of it*; and I have seen enough of those promises turned into real provision over the years to *know* – *without the least doubt* – that behind the words of the Bible stands our all-powerful and loving Father, who not only *can* make His words good, but *wants* to see this happen!

So, why can't we overcome these temptations; why aren't we all experiencing the promises of God turned into actual provisions? Since the promises are real enough, there must be something else wrong? We have to admit there is "*something else*" wrong. In our search for the culprit, we are usually required to turn the searchlight on ourselves. It doesn't necessarily mean that we need to pray more, give more time to Bible study, go to more prayer meetings, try harder to "*be good*," or give more money to missions. All of these things are profitable, but they aren't at the heart of this particular problem that needs to be solved.

Between us and the fulfillment of God's wonderful promises always lies a situation containing temptation - *and it is how we respond to temptation that determines whether or not we receive the fulfillment of our promises.*



In other words, when we learn how to face temptation, we will have learned how to see the promise become reality - our personal possession and fulfillment!

Before we go on, we should have a very clear understanding of what temptation is *not*. We wouldn't want to create another misunderstanding by implying that the reason we don't receive God's provision is because we are repeatedly indulging in sinful acts - like stealing, lying, adultery, etc. We can certainly be tempted to do some of these things, and if we choose that sort of life, this would be part of the reason why we are left standing with an empty promise instead of a fulfilled provision. But temptation is more than the comic-book caricature of a sexy woman, luring her prey into some adulterous act.

The Greek word that has been translated as "*temptation*," in the Bible means, "*that which puts to the proof*" - whether by good or malicious design. Temptation is designed to bring out what is really in our hearts. Temptation, in itself, is not good or evil; it simply puts to the proof and test. *It reveals what we really are!*

For example, steel must be tempered by heat and put to the test under varying degrees of stress to see how it will react for its intended use. Temptation puts to the test how we will react in a situation related to the promise God has given us. If we react according to Biblical specifications, the provision will be ours. This does *not* mean that God's promises are earned or deserved - God's gifts are always free, because of God's grace to mankind. The question is whether or not we *have the capacity to receive what God has promised?*

Untempered steel, given too much pressure, will break. Fulfillment of a promise, without preparation, can break us as well! We must come to realize that there is a reason for temptation? Its purpose is not to make life hard or difficult, but rather to assist in the preparation needed to receive the good things God desires to give to us.

Seen in this perspective, temptation isn't something frightening or to be avoided - rather, it is a necessary part of our Christian life - something we should understand

and face eagerly and joyfully (James 1:2). After all, temptation is designed to prepare us to receive what we long to have!

The Bible is our textbook. We will find as we search its pages that the purpose and principle of temptation is clearly revealed and demonstrated here – beginning with the Old Testament and carrying on through the New Testament. A series of test cases will show how temptation provided the turning point that determined the success or failure of experiencing fulfilled promises.

The Christian life can never be defined in simple *methods!*. I am not suggesting that we can discover some easy step-by-step formula for *how* to face temptation and thus receive the fulfillment of God's promises. However, we will discover that God always operates according to clearly defined principles. When we understand these principles and learn to apply them in our life, we can move on and grow up into the fullness of life the Bible presents.

Right now – before we go any further – why not ask God to open your own understanding to this exciting possibility, and say with me.

"Lord, teach me Thy ways!"

⌘⌘⌘⌘ ⌘⌘⌘⌘

Jesus prayed, just before going to the cross, "*I pray not that Thou, [Father] should take them out of the world, but that Thou should keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world, Sanctify them through Thy truth*" [John 17:15-17].

God has a divine purpose for the believer between the time of his conversion to Jesus Christ and the end of his life on earth.

Paul ends his marvelous letter to the Romans by saying, "*Now to Him [Jesus Christ] that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, [of the kingdom of God] which was kept secret since the world began. But NOW made manifest, and by THE SCRIPTURES OF THE PROPHETS, according to the commandments of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith*" (Romans 16:25-26).

Other translations, perhaps, makes this concept easier to comprehend:

"Now to Him who is able to set you on your feet as His own sons – according to my gospel, according to the preaching of Jesus Christ Himself, and in accordance with the disclosing of that secret purpose which, after long ages of silence, has now been made known (in full agreement with the writings of the prophets long ago), by the command of the everlasting God to all the gentiles, that they might turn to Him in the obedience of faith – to Him, I say, the only God who is wise, be glory for ever through Jesus Christ, amen!" – [J. B. Phillips]

"To Him who is able to make you strong, according to the gospel I preach, and the proclamation concerning Jesus Christ, in harmony with the unveiling of the mystery shrouded in silence in past ages, but now brought to light and by the command of the eternal God made known through the writings of the Prophets among all the Gentiles to win them to obedience to the faith – to God, the only wise, through Jesus Christ, even to Him be the glory through all the ages! Amen."

[The New Testament in Modern Speech – by Weymouth]

What "Scriptures of the prophets" does Paul refer to?

One of the most interesting and informative verses in all the Bible is 1 Corinthians 10:6 that states, "*Now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted*" – verses 7 through 10 lists Israel's sin, then, verse 11 continues, "*Now all these things happened unto them for examples; are they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*" – This passage, of course, is referring to the children of Israel and God's dealings with them throughout the Old Testament. All these things of God's dealing with Israel given in the Old Testament happened for our benefit. God's dealings with Israel, that we read about in the whole Old Testament, was to give us lessons on how we, as believers, are to live for God. The experiences we will face and temptations that will come into our life are pictured in God's dealings with Israel. As we read of their trials and the promises God gave to them, we realize that it was all for us today in this Church Age to encourage and inspire us in our walk with God.

As we look into the Old Testament, we see that Israel was enslaved in Egypt, under the cruel whip of taskmasters; however, God delivered them from this miserable bondage. They were "*redeemed*" out of Egypt, as they obeyed God's command to apply the blood of a sacrificed lamb to the doorpost of their homes.

This is clearly a "*figure*" of our salvation from the bondage of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

However, this was only the beginning of Israel's journey. God wanted them not only out of Egypt, but to enter into the land of Canaan. Between Egypt and the land of Canaan lay a wilderness!

(1) SALVATION FROM SIN

After the blood was applied, Israel left Egypt's bondage.

(2) BAPTISM IN WATER

Israel's *first* experience was entering and coming up out of the Red Sea.

(3) THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The next observation in the life of Israel was God's provision of the supernatural cloud and pillar of fire, leading, guiding and directing the children of Israel

(4) GOD'S PROMISE AND COMMANDMENT

Beginning in Exodus 19, God reveals His will for the children of Israel. This is the Scripture, no doubt, which Paul is referring to in Romans 16:26, when He says, "The Scriptures of the prophets."

Exactly what does Exodus 19 teach?

Exodus 19:5-6, "Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

The point is, before God's people could possess the promises God had given to them, there were conditions that they had to fulfill.

God's Promises Are Conditional

Between each of us and the fulfillment of God's promises stands a situation that includes temptation. Let's take a closer look at some of the basic promises God offers all who come to Him and see at what point – in relation to the promise – temptation enters the picture.

What could be sadder than Christians who have resigned themselves to the erroneous idea that God either cannot – or will not – pour out His blessings on us today? To hear some talk, you would think that God is tight-fisted, dribbling out just enough blessings to barely keep us going in this present world.

However, Scripture pictures God as eager and anxious to give good things without preference or partiality. While the Bible is often referred to as a Book of Promises, it is just as much a textbook on, "*How to Turn Promises Into Provisions.*" No promise in the entire Bible is an empty promise. Luke 1:37 tells us, "*For with God nothing is ever impossible, and no word from God shall be without power or impossible of fulfillment*" (Amplified Bible).

Our first "*test case*" is the Israelites -- God's chosen people. He brought them out of Egyptian slavery in order to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey. His promise was, "*you will become a great nation in a glorious land 'flowing with milk and honey' even as the God of your fathers promised you...God will give you great cities full of good things – cities you didn't build, wells you didn't dig, and vineyards and olive trees you didn't plant*" (Deuteronomy 6:3, 10-11).

Keep in mind, that although we are speaking of a specific people in a certain place and time in history – the same promises are applicable to us today – as God's *spiritual* children. God desires to bring us out of whatever bondage we may be in -- psychological, spiritual, or physical -- in order to bring us into "*a land flowing with milk and honey.*" This is a picture of the abundance of good things (both spiritual and

physical) that God has for us in this life.

It sounds almost too good to be true doesn't it? God wants to give us everything we could possibly need – things for which we are not required to labor! Moses goes on to say to the Israelites, "God will drive your enemies out before you" (verse 19).

In plain, everyday language, this means that God desires to lead us into a situation – spiritual and physical – where He will provide for our every need – job, home, friends, clothes, food, peace of mind – everything our hearts may desire. To get all of this we do not have to work for it – earn it – or deserve it.

If it is all that simple, what kept the Israelites from claiming these promises from God? How is this similar – illustrative – of our Christian walk today? Doesn't the New Testament tell us that God gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as a free gift – and that by accepting Him as our Savior we no longer have to pay for our own sins – which is the death penalty? God tells us that, instead of a death penalty, we are told we can receive the gift of God's grace, His parson, and eternal life in Christ.

This brings us to what is probably one of the most debated aspects of the Christian life: legalism versus "*everything by grace*." There are groups of believers on each side of the fence – those who lean to the legalistic by overemphasizing the belief that we must observe certain rules and regulations in order to be in right standing with God – and those who say that under the New Covenant (the covenant sealed by Jesus Christ on the cross), we cannot earn God's gifts by keeping rules and regulations. All things are free in Christ.

What are we to do? Are we to choose up sides and come out fighting? God forbid! Neither extreme position is correct. Yet both have caught some aspect of the truth and carried it too far. Error can come by over-emphasis or neglect. God doesn't want legalism but neither does He want disobedience! In reality, everything God has for us is a gift. We cannot earn anything by our own goodness or efforts; however, God's gifts can only be received on certain conditions.

Just in case this sounds like double-talk to you, we shall look at some promises in the New Testament.

Jesus said, "*If you stay in Me and obey My commands, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted*" (John 15:7). This is Jesus Himself speaking, and He is giving a remarkable promise. But notice the "*if*" – there is a condition to the promise. In fact, I don't know of a single promise in the Bible that does not have a condition attached to it.

Consider the promise of salvation: "*God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). Some people in this world are perishing because they haven't met the condition for salvation, which is offered as a free gift – but, only to those who choose to believe. The

Amplified Bible explains the term “*believing*” as, “anyone who trusts, clings to, relies on Jesus Christ.” We are talking about more than lip service here; rather it is a matter of a total personal trust and reliance on Christ in every aspect of life. That is the condition.

The condition always describes *how* a promise is to be fulfilled. Only under these prescribed conditions can the promise become reality. Taking another promise of Jesus, we note: “*I am the Vine, you are branches. Whoever lives in Me and I in him shall produce a large crop of fruit*” (John 15:5). The promise is that we shall produce a large crop of fruit, provided we live in Him and allow Him to live in us. Jesus goes on to explain *why* this is so. “*For apart from Me you can't do a thing. If anyone separates from Me, he is thrown away like a useless branch, withers and is gathered into a pile with all the others and burned*” (John 15:5b-6) The reason the condition is necessary is a very simple one – apart from Jesus Christ we cannot produce spiritual fruit!

The reasons for putting conditions on the promises given to the Israelites were the same: apart from God they would not be able to possess the land and enjoy the kind of life God wanted for them. Can you see that giving the condition, “*If you are willing and obedient...*” before the promise...“*you will eat of the good of the land...*” was due to the fact that God knew if they tried to do it in their own way, they would fail miserably in the end? Their obedience to God was designed to reduce their dependency on their own resources and strength, and increase their dependency on God.

God is not a tyrant who wants us all to cower in obedience before Him; but it is because He loves us and knows our natures well enough to see that – left to our own devices – we always make a mess of things. When Jesus said, “*On your own, apart from Me, you can do nothing*” (John 15:5), He meant that apart from Him we cannot do anything truly worthwhile and lasting. We just cannot produce the kind of fruits He can produce in us and through us when we stay close to Him and depend on Him. We need to give up our self-sufficiency so that we can come to a place in our Christian experience where we cease from our own frantic labor and let Jesus Christ do the work.

Another truth that Jesus tried to impress on His followers was that *if they believe in Him, they would one day do greater works than He was doing*. One day the disciples asked Jesus, “*What are we to do that we may (habitually) be working the works of God? – What are we to do to carry out what God requires?*” Jesus replied, “*This is the work (service) that God asks of you, that you believe in the One Whom He has sent – that you cleave to, trust, rely on and have faith in His Messenger*” (John 6:28-29 Amplified Bible). Jesus said to them – and is saying to us today – that when we stop trying to do things in our own strength and recognize our own insufficiency, only then we can let Him work through us.

As Christians, we *know* in our hearts that what we do in our own strength “*for the Lord*” amounts to zero. Oh, we may busy ourselves in various church activities, even responsibilities of carrying out the ministry, but *we*, in our self, cannot save anyone. We cannot heal anybody. We cannot comfort the brokenhearted, give sight to the blind, or set anybody free from the prison of their guilt. It is only when we come to a position of

total reliance on Jesus – total trust, obedience and rest from our own labors – that we will see Jesus being salvation to others through us; see Him heal and comfort others and set them free through us. Always it is His doing through our willingness and obedience to His command.

This is the only way we can ever enter our Promised Land. Because the Promise Land is a place of rest, frantic self-efforts do not belong there. Hebrews describes God's promises about a place of rest and how we may enter:

"1, Although God's promise still stands--His promise that all may enter His place of rest--we ought to tremble with fear because some of you may be on the verge of failing to get there after all. 2, For this wonderful news--the message that God wants to save us--has been given to us just as it was to those who lived in the time of Moses. But it didn't do them any good because they didn't believe it. They didn't mix it with faith. 3, For only we who believe God can enter into His place of rest. He has said, 'I have sworn in My anger that those who don't believe Me will never get in,' even though He has been ready and waiting for them since the world began. 4, We know He is ready and waiting because it is written that God rested on the seventh day of creation, having finished all that He had planned to make. 5, Even so they didn't get in, for God finally said, 'They shall never enter My rest.' 6, Yet the promise remains and some get in--but not those who had the first chance, for they disobeyed God and failed to enter. 7, But He has set another time for coming in, and that time is now. He announced this through King David long years after man's first failure to enter, saying in the words already quoted, 'Today when you hear Him calling, do not harden your hearts against Him.' 8, This new place of rest he is talking about does not mean the land of Israel that Joshua led them into. If that were what God meant, he would not have spoken long afterwards about 'today' being the time to get in. 9, So there is a full complete rest still waiting for the people of God. 10, Christ has already entered there. He is resting from His work, just as God did after the creation. 11, Let us do our best to go into that place of rest, too, being careful not to disobey God as the children of Israel did, thus failing to get in" (Hebrews 4:1-11 Living Bible).

Some people seem to think that this place of rest is where we enter after our physical death, but that is not what Scripture teaches. It is not consistent with the teachings of Jesus. He said – over and over again – that in our Christian walk in this life, we are to cease from our own labors now, letting Him work through us. Our Promised Land today is a place of rest where we will dwell in cities we didn't build and received good things for which we did not work – *because God alone will do the work for us and through us!* It is physically and spiritually impossible for God to do this until we surrender our attempt to do it for ourselves.

The condition God gives us is that we must be willing to give up our own ways and work, and be obedient to His every command as He lives in and works through us. God's promises must be seen in relation to their conditions.

It is in the midst of our reaction to the conditions that temptation enters the picture. Temptation relates to the promises through the condition. When a promise is given with a condition. God is saying, "I will do this if you will do that." Temptation then presents us with the choice either (1) to fulfill God's condition, or, (2) to ignore it. If we fulfill the condition, we can enter into the provision – the Promised Land. If we ignore the condition, we will not be able to receive fulfillment of the promise.

Returning to Hebrews, we read:

"But,' God says, 'I was very angry with them, for their hearts were always looking somewhere else instead of up to me, and they never found the paths I wanted them to follow.' Then God, full of this anger against them, bound himself with an oath that he would never let them come to his place of rest" (Hebrews 3:10-11– Living Bible).

God's promises are *real*; so are His conditions. There is still a Promise Land waiting for you and me. The decision to go there becomes an individual choice. Don't be afraid to venture out into God's provisions – your Promised Land!

What Is Our "Wilderness?"

In the experiences we read of in God's dealings with the children of Israel throughout the Old Testament we see that there was a "*wilderness area*" between them and the Promised Land. *Why?* Why did God place a "*wilderness*" between them and land that He had promised them – and why does He also place a "*wilderness*" between our Promised Land and us? For the children of Israel it was a *geographical* fact that the wilderness existed between the start of their journey at the Red Sea and Canaan, their Promised Land. They could not get to Canaan except through the wilderness. For us, the wilderness is not a *geographic* fact – nevertheless, it is there – a very real wilderness! Between God's promise and its actual fulfillment lies a physical and spiritual wilderness, consisting of problems, difficulties, and confusion. This is, of course, the area where *temptation* enters as a focal point.

We have seen that temptation relates to the promise through the condition. It is in the wilderness that we come to the point of questioning the validity of the condition, and at times the promise itself. That kind of question *must* be solved before we can move on into the provision – and God placed the wilderness experience in our way to bring about that confrontation. We *must* come to see the validity of God's condition and fulfill them before we can move on.

This is an extremely serious and definite interpretation, especially to those who think that God's love is of such a nature that He won't hold back the fulfillment of a promise just because the condition isn't completely met. Some ask, "Didn't Jesus take care of all that when He died for us? Didn't Jesus pay our debts and fulfill our conditions so that all we have to do is ask and receive? If we love Him and say our prayers, He will surely give us the promises we have claimed and hung unto for all these years, won't He?"

If this has been your thinking, you may be in danger of making a serious mistake. The promises you are waiting for may never become yours. If it were at all possible, God would *unconditionally* give us everything for which we ask. But He knows that He cannot give us everything we ask for without us fulfilling some conditions, because if He did, it would destroy us.

John D. Rockefeller once said, "*I have seldom, if ever, found a place where I could give in substantial amounts without hurting people.*" Just think of it - if John D. Rockefeller felt like that - how do you think God feels?

Many believe, when they read God's promises of the land flowing with milk and honey - the land with wells, vineyards, cities that they need not labor for - a land just waiting for them (realizing the spiritual implications of these promises God made) - think, "*Oh, Lord, this is wonderful. We're willing and obedient and ready to receive it!*"

However, God has a way of saying, "*Your not ready to receive the promise yet! You could not stand success in this area right now!"*

Many feel like the prodigal son - "*Father, give me my inheritance right now!*"

How did the prodigal son get into trouble? Be demanding his inheritance too soon! When all that money was in his pocket, he forgot about his father. Too much - too soon - this nearly destroyed him, and it will do the same to us.

"An inheritance hastily gotten at the beginning, in the end will not be blessed" (Proverbs 20:21).

Have you ever heard of someone who became an instant movie star? Overnight they are chosen by the star makers; given the Madison-Avenue treatment, television, magazines, parties, attention, and admiration. Soon they become a self-willed and self-centered individual. Before long, they are so conceited no one can work with them. Like a shooting star falling from the sky, they shine brilliantly for a season and are burned up, cast away - and forgotten. This may be an extreme example, but watch the pattern in any area where someone comes into sudden success or riches. A million-dollar inheritance can destroy a person who is immature and unprepared. If a businessman is wise, he wouldn't place his son as head of the business when he's fifteen; but rather, he gives him a job as clean-up boy, and as he proves himself capable, he gives him more responsibility.

This is true with material possessions and with spiritual riches, as well. Our Heavenly Father wants us to become spiritually mature individuals. He wants us to be His witness in the entire world. He wants to minister through us - to show His power and love through us to others. He cannot, however, dump the whole package on us before we are mature enough to handle the responsibility.

What do you think would happen to us if some wealthy person said, "*I think you*

are doing a marvelous work for the Lord and I'm going to send you five thousand dollars a month for the rest of your life – give you and your family a new beach-front villa – and, also, a new chauffeur-driven Cadillac every year."

We, without doubt, would start thinking we were important and that God is lucky to have us around. With all probability, we would soon forget that God is the source of everything we have – and what we are, and start thinking that we were the reason things were going so well.

Moses warned the children of Israel about four things that could happen when they had received riches and eaten until they were full. Can you see the relevance of these things for us today? (See Deuteronomy 6:12-16)

- (1) They could easily forget God
- (2) They could attribute their good life to a source other than God
- (3) They could provoke God by trying His patience
- (4) They could test and tempt Him

It is a fairly simple matter to see how one could easily forget God or attribute success to a source other than God when success and riches come our way. A businessman who makes it to the top of his profession, or a politician who wins a landslide election, can be tempted to think it all happened because he did such a good job or was such a great man.

How do we provoke God? The Israelites did it by asking for more than God wanted them to have at the moment. They wanted a sign greater than He was pleased to give. This is a temptation that we are also faced with when things are going well for us.

Young Christians, excited over their new-found faith – convinced that God can and will do anything they ask – often go around looking for a situation where they can demonstrate the power of God to others.

This can happen whenever some enthusiastic believer begins to understand a little of the Scriptures concerning divine healing. Convinced that God does heal today – they assume that God will heal anyone – anywhere – anytime – under any circumstance. Eager to see God's power manifested, they, with - no preparation or forethought, no consideration of the situation or God's purpose in the matter – just begin commanding the sick one to be healed. [When, at times, nothing happens, they are crushed – and the sick one's hopes and faith are shaken]

As a result of immaturity – (lack of spiritual growth) – they, like Israel, rush ahead of God – asking for a miracle, a sign that God has in no way indicated He wanted to perform than and there. God, of course, does heal. We all have witnessed His healing power at work in many instances. But, some fall into the temptation of attempting to "test God."

God has promised to answer all of our requests, however, the point is that God

also has conditions to His promises. God allows us to go through our personal wilderness experiences as “*conditions*” to prepare us to receive His promises. To mention a few:

- 1. Freedom from condemnation** – Romans 8:1, “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*”
- 2. Confidence in God** Acts 4:13, “*Now when they saw the boldness* – [also translated “confidence”] – *of Peter and John... marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*”
- 3. Asking** – Matthew 7:7-11, “*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*” Also, Luke 11:9-13, “*And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?*”
- 4. Keeping commandments** – 1 John 3:23-24, “*And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.*”
- 5. Pleasing God** – Hebrews 11:6, “*But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*” Also James 1:5-8, “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*”

If God answered our prayers in spite of our lack of faithfulness and obedience to meet His conditions, we would, with all probability, (as Paul was warned about in 2 Corinthians 12:7) – swell up with pride over what we interpret as “*deep spirituality.*”

When those who receive riches from God – material or spiritual – consequently stumble and fall, it isn’t because the riches in themselves are dangerous or destructive, but rather, because *those who receive them are not prepared to handle them.*

Skies might make a wonderful gift for someone – or – perhaps a carpenter would

be thrilled to receive an electric handsaw. However, I have seen too many broken legs of inexperienced skiers for me to ever want to attempt skiing - and anyone who was not experienced in handling a powerful electric handsaw could certainly be badly injured - maybe even lose a finger or two - should they try without training.

We all have heard of some family that came into sudden wealth - and shortly after, their children ran wild, getting failing grades in school, the marriage goes on the rocks, and the wife runs off with another man.

Are skies, or electric handsaws, dangerous? Couldn't God trust me with sudden riches? One could arrive at the conclusion that, "*Skies and electric handsaws are dangerous and I will never have any.*" However, wouldn't it be more practical - in the face of reality - to say, "*I realize that it takes skill to learn to ski or to operate an electric handsaw and, if I ever attempt to try either one I better learn how to handle such things before I use them?"*

One might say, "Money leads to misery, therefore, I trust that I never have wealth!" Or, one should say, "I need to learn how to handle wealth carefully - find out responsible stewardship so that I am prepared if God wants to trust me with more wealth in life."

The first reaction - "*I'll never go skiing - or own a electric handsaw...*" is the result of what could be called "*The Wilderness Complex.*"

We have known of those who have been hurt skiing, or using an electric handsaw, so we feel much safer never trying either one - or we've known some whose life was ruined by a measure of success, and so we think we would be safer never trying dangerous activities - or, we would be safer being poor and in need.

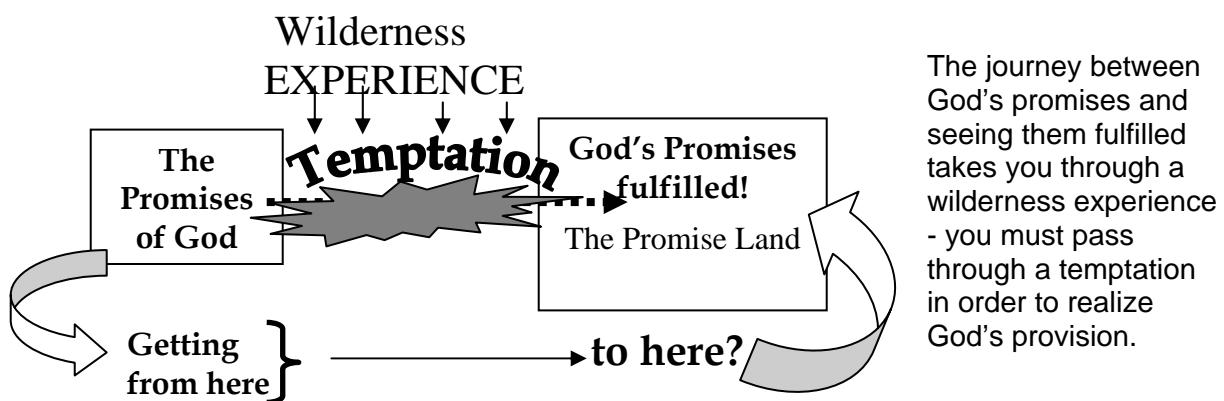
We all know of those who rise to fame and position and later fail. This could well develop a "*Wilderness Complex*" for us. Some fear success, afraid that if it came to them, they might forget God, get big-headed, and stumble. They reason something like, "*Lord, keep be poor and humble - so that I will stay dependent and faithful to You!*"

The children of Israel wandered in endless circles in their wilderness for forty years. They experienced wonderful miracles from God, ate their fill - and promptly forgot God - or tried His patience by asking for more. Over and over again they repeated the same pattern. Consequently, their wilderness experience was a series of problems with no satisfactory solutions. We see some disastrous consequences come to other wilderness-wanders, and so we conclude that we don't want any blessings, deciding we'd rather stay in a condition of continuous need so that we won't forget our constant dependency on God.

As part of our "*wilderness complex*," we develop the idea that success always spoils - power always corrupts - riches are the root of all evil. We've become so used to dwelling in the wilderness that we think God wants us to remain there permanently. We accept the wilderness as the normal way of life for a spiritual Christian.

We reason, "Jesus must have been poor, He didn't have a home, He even rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey." So we say it is Christ-like to be poor. We extend that thought even further and say it is Christ-like and spiritual to suffer constant duress, persecutions, and hardships. Some Christians feel that they can best glorify God by staying permanently in difficult situations in order for others to see their patience and conclude that God enables them to bear their burdens without complaining. *Permanent* wilderness-dwellers look critically at those who appear to live happily in a life free from obvious wilderness problems – having "passed through" their wilderness experience and live in God's Promised Land!

The point is this: Each one of us must travel through wilderness experiences because it is there that we learn dependence on God. When we learn genuine dependence on God, we do not need to remain in the wilderness any longer. But, rather, we have an open invitation to enter into God's Promise Land waiting for us.



We read the promises of God in His Word that are needed in our situation and pray for their fulfillment in our life. Temptations – (our wilderness experiences) – are the conditions God has laid down to accomplish His promises. How we respond to these temptations that God has allowed determines the fulfillment of His glorious promises.

It is possible to receive the fullness of God's promise in one area of our life and still be going through "*a wilderness experience*" in another area. There is a vast difference between genuine wilderness *experience* and a wilderness *complex*.

God desires to bring us into the Promise Land in *every area* of our life! This was God's plan for the children of Israel, literally, and it is His plan for us, spiritually. God desires to provide us with joy, peace and love. He wants to bless us in other that others may see His goodness and, in turn, come to Him to be blessed.

God's original plan for the Israelites was that they might be an example to their day and world of His goodness and His ability to undertake in their behalf. They were chosen so that they might be instruments in His hands in drawing the entire world to Himself. Today, in this dispensation, we are His chosen people.

It was not God's original intention for the children of Israel to wander around in the wilderness for forty years – (It was actually only an *eleven days* journey from Mount Sinai to the Promise Land) – and God does not want us wandering around in our wilderness years on end. God wants to fulfill His promises, bless, and undertake for us in order that we may be an example to our confused and needy world. He wants our lives, homes, and children to reflect His glory so that those who do not know Him will be drawn to Him.

When others see our lives, God does not want them to turn away sadly because our life is shallow and empty – *no different from the lives they seek so desperately to escape!* God wants our life to be noticeably different – not just because we *talk* Christianity, but because our life is radiant with a joy and power that only Christ can give. When our life is like that – in the home – neighborhood – at work – then the tired, the desperate, the rebels, and doubters would come to seek and find answers.

Jeremiah 33:8-9 speaks of this deep desire on God's part. It says, “*And I will cleanse away all their sins against Me, and pardon them. Then this city will be an honor to Me, and it will give Me joy and be a source of praise and glory to Me before all the nations of the earth! The people of the world will see the good I do for My people and will tremble with awe!*

Jesus expressed His Father's desire this way – “*You are the world's light – a city on a hill, glowing in the night for all to see. Don't hide your light! Let it shine for all; let your good deeds glow for all to see, so that they will praise your heavenly Father*” (Matthew 5:14-16).

God wants to restore our life and cleanse every bit of rebellion from our heart. His desire is that our life be a source of praise and glory to His goodness. When this is accomplished, we can move from the wilderness into the Promise Land and be the fulfillment of Jesus' commands to be a light in our world to God's glory.

We were never meant to be permanent wilderness-dwellers. We are to learn *how* to walk through the wilderness into His provision.

Continuing the thought of “*Why God Allows Temptation*,” I would like to repeat some thoughts I have in my study on “*Motivation*” – as well as the study on – “*The Kingdom of God*”

THE LAW OF THE FOUR “P's”

Christianity is not complicated! The relationship between God and man can be understood in terms simple enough for a child to grasp, however, the “*spiritual*” implications of these truths bring the wisest of men to a point of awe!

Christianity *in operation* is not only practical but it is also completely dependable. In His dealings with men, God gives us a straightforward conditional statement: “*If you will do this, I will do that; on one hand, if you refuse, this will certainly happen.*”

GOD MAKES HIS PROMISES **CONDITIONAL**, FOLLOWED BY A SITUATION, **BRINGING ABOUT A TEMPTATION**, PROVOKING A DECISION TO EITHER OBEY AND FULFILL GOD'S CONDITION -- OR IGNORE IT!

- The fulfillment of God's promises cannot come until after we have passed through a situation that brings temptation and decide to obey God's Word!

This pattern, *of enduring a temptation*, is invariably in God's workings with us. It is consistent throughout the Bible as well as in personal experience. There is no exception to this rule!

The Law of the Four P's!

[See page 68 for Biblical Example]

*God gives a **PROMISE**,
s linked to a **PRINCIPLE** (or condition),
followed by a **PROBLEM** (temptation)
- leading to a **PROVISION**!*

God's **promises** are given to be fulfilled! Unfulfilled promises should never be the normal Christian's experience. The trouble is that many have, in the midst of temptation, become preoccupied with the **problem** -- not understanding the temptation -- in relation to God's **provision**.

A **PROBLEM** ("a temptation") does not mean that God has not answered our prayer - the **PROBLEM** hasn't come *instead of* the answer, but, rather, the **PROBLEM** is *a part of* the answer, or *the means of obtaining* the **PROVISION**!

**God allows a problem - [or "temptation"]
- to prepare us to receive His provision!**

We often blame the **problem**, -- ["temptation"] -- on the devil, and feel that Satan has interfered and upset God's intention. Of course, the devil **is** in the picture, **but** only with God's permission!

*"Blessed is the man who shall endure **temptation**, for when he is tried, he shall receive . . ." [James 1:12]*

TO "CLAIM A **PROMISE**" WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE "**PRINCIPLE**" OF TURNING GOD'S "**PROMISES**" INTO "**PROVISIONS**"!

We should expect a situation where we will be tempted to ignore, or disobey, God's Word concerning the "*conditions*" for the provision. If we ignore God's conditions there can be **no** provision! When we decide to fulfill the conditions, we can confidently expect God to bring us into the provision.

KEEP IN MIND GOD'S STRATEGY OF DEALING WITH MANKIND

The Holy Spirit lead the writers of the New Testament to use the experience of Israel's wilderness journey as a pattern for all believers because the **promises** God established for them are now offered to the believer, as well, through the Person of Jesus Christ.

Israel received their promise in Egypt when God said, "*I will lead you to a wonderful land flowing with milk and honey.*"

When the believer accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior, he became eligible for the same promise: "*I will lead you into a place of abundant blessings.*"

God brought the children of Israel to Mount Sinai and gave them His **PRINCIPLES** - The Ten Commandments - and the **CONDITION** - "*If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good of the land,*" however, then came the wilderness, or the **PROBLEM**, where they were tested!

Why?

The children of Israel needed to learn who they were and who God was - in a way they would never forget. Only then, could they come safely into their provision without becoming haughty, proud and consequently destroy themselves.

Listen as God speaks through Moses to the children of Israel, "*Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands . . . Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today.*" [Deuteronomy 8:2, 12-18]

The purpose of the wilderness, for Israel, (and the purpose of temptations for us today), is to cause us to recognize our insufficiency and God's all-sufficiency! Once we realize that there must be a willingness and obedience on our part to follow God's condition, and we realize we cannot fulfill God's conditions on our own and, are willing to give up trying to obey God's conditions in our own strength. It cannot be done in our own strength! - [Since we cannot, on our own, be willing and obedience to God's conditions, how, then, can we meet God's condition?] - That's why it is imperative to realize that Jesus Christ has already **DONE** it (He has already accomplished God's conditions) for us!

Let's first look at God's gift of salvation:

GOD'S "GIFT OF SALVATION" IS SUBJECT TO THE LAW OF THE FOUR P's

God promises salvation to those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. The principle is our faith in Him, the provision is peace – knowing we have forgiveness of sin and eternal life – YET – many believers are struggling in their first wilderness of doubts about forgiveness of sins. They say, "*I just can't believe that Christ has forgiven me of all my sins!*" There is no way to get the **provision** of real peace in God except through the **problem** of doubt!

To have the provision, peace, we must come to the point of deciding, in spite of our feelings and doubts -- God's Word can be trusted. We must *choose* to believe that Christ is indeed God's Son who died for our sins.

There is no other way to have peace with God!

Peace and assurance can only come *after* we have decided to trust God's Word in the midst of uncertainty - **That is Faith!**

If we do our part - fulfill the condition of faith - ["*believe on Jesus Christ*"] - we can be absolutely certain that God has done His part. **We have God's Word on that!**

Between God's promise and the provision is a wilderness we must pass through. The temptation is to distrust God's Word. This sense of "security" and "peace" in God can only come after a period of serious doubt and questioning!

Facing temptation victoriously is a condition of God's promises!

God's intent and purpose for us, once we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, is for our life to be an abundance of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. [See Galatians 5:22-23.]

Why is it that this description of the Fruit of the Spirit seldom fits our daily experience? The reason is: The Fruit of the Spirit does not grow *automatically* in our life, but only as we deliberately chooses to live by God's principles through a problem situation – a temptation!

First, we have a **PROMISE** that the Holy Spirit will transform us into a Christ-like person, displaying the Fruit of the Spirit. However, the **PRINCIPLE** is, "When (and only when) *the Holy Spirit controls our life, He will produce this kind of fruit in us*" [Galatians 5:22].

The **PRINCIPLE** (or "condition") is that the Holy Spirit must control our life! The Fruit of the Spirit cannot be produced by will-power -- only the Holy Spirit can produce it in our lives. It is only as we are rightly connected to Christ through the Holy Spirit, that we can produce the Fruit of the Spirit.

Between the **PROMISE**, the **PRINCIPLE** and the **PROVISION**, we can expect **PROBLEMS - TEMPTATIONS!**

When we ask God to produce the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives, we can expect Him to put us into a situation where we will be confronted with some kind of temptation -- something, or some people, who are very difficult to love!

The **PROVISION**, more love, comes only as we go through problems and allow Christ to take over and control our natural inclinations.

We cannot get to the **PROVISION** without going through the **PROBLEM - -(TEMPTATION)!**

Jesus, Himself, describes how fruit is encouraged to grow in John 15:1-4:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me."

This "pruning back for greater production" is an apt description of our wilderness experience. We go through circumstances in which we cannot act in love and patience in our own strength. We are forced to admit to our unlovingness and impatience.

We are brought to a decision. We can either admit our insufficiency, confess our unlovingness, and turn our self over to God, asking Him to *make* us loving, or, we can refuse to see God's hand in the problem, explode, and blame the whole thing on the terrible circumstances we have fallen into.

WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH PROBLEMS?

A major part of our journey from **PROMISE** to **PROVISION** is a **PROBLEM** (*the temptation*)! Our behavior in the problem - determines to what extent (how soon, if ever or not) we will come into our provision!

There were three basic alternatives facing Israel in the wilderness:

1. ANOTHER LAP

A negative response to the **PROBLEM** leads to an extended stay in the wilderness. God provides a similar set of circumstances to give the believer another chance through the same problem.

2. BLEACHED BONES

Repeated negative responses causes the believer to perish in the wilderness. A continuing hardened attitude eventually prevents him from coming into the **PROVISION**!

3. STAND AND ENTER

If the believer's response is positive and he chooses to stand on God's **PRINCIPLES** through the **PROBLEM**, he is able to enter his **PROVISION** with little delay.

First, note that Israel, having just been delivered from the Red Sea, were confident God would take care of them. They danced and sang about the Promise-Land. [Read Exodus 15:1-2, 13-18 and 30] However, their next **PROBLEM** was different, when they arrived at Morah, they had no water to drink.

God sent a **PROBLEM** of a different kind from the one that they had seen Him solve before, and they did not trust God to provide for them now. They cried, "*Must we die of thirst here in the wilderness?*" Because of this negative response, God, in essence, said to Israel, "*Take another lap!*"

Isn't it true, that we often anticipate that God will work in a certain way, unaware that He is working in another entirely different way?

Let's say that there is a difficult problem in your life, a temptation that you can't seem to conquer. You pray and ask God to take the temptation away. You expect God to immediately remove any temptation far away from you. However, instead, God works in a different way than you expected. He deals with the real enemy - *your spiritual growth!* God permits the temptation to continue, maybe even to become stronger, so that you will turn to Him and ask Him to enable you to overcome - through the strength the Holy Spirit by the indwelling Christ, Who lives within your heart. Through this "*wilderness experience,*" you learn to let Christ Jesus rule within your heart and life!

We, often, blame our difficulties - (or temptations) - on our circumstances, expecting God to change them. However, when we identify the root cause of our real problem and realize that our own immaturity is the cause of the problem, then we can allow God to change our circumstances.

Let's continue with our allegory of God's dwellings with the children of Israel.

Israel arrived at Elim, a place of palm trees and twelve springs of water. God once more showed them how He could provide. But, then, just a few days later, they couldn't find anything to eat. Instead of their problem being "*bitter water,*" it was now a lack of food.

Again, their response was negative. God had provided a similar set of circumstances to give them a chance to trust Him and to stand on His **PRINCIPLES** - or to ignore His principles and complain! *They complained!*

God was patient with them, and rained quail in the evenings and manna in the mornings. Again, God had demonstrated His love and ability to provide, but He said,

in essence, "take another lap!"

This lap in the wilderness for the children of Israel, led them to Rephidim, where, it wasn't "*bitter water*" that was the problem, but, there was no water at all! Here was a familiar situation to the time the water was "*bitter*." God had provided before, how did they react this time? Again, their response was negative, they complained!

God told Moses to strike the rock at Mount Horeb, and water gushed out. Moses named the place "*Meribah*," meaning "*tempting God to slay us*," for it was here they said, "*Is God going to take care of us or not?*" God said, in essence, "*Take another lap in the wilderness.*"

The wilderness, from Egypt to Canaan, can be crossed on foot in eleven days! It took Israel forty years, because at each lap - each confrontation with a problem (temptation) - they complained instead of trusting God.

Their rebellion hardened. They murmured and complained all the way across the desert, and when they finally arrived at the border of the Promise Land, and saw it had fortified cities and giants, they refused to enter in.

A second alternative for Israel was to die in the wilderness, their bones bleached in the hot sun. **Ten times** Israel had tried God's patience and, so, finally the laps gave out. Scripture tells us that their hearts were hardened in rebellion and, therefore, God lost patience with them.

They did not come into the fullness of **PROVISION**. This does not mean the loss of their deliverance from Egypt's bondage. They were no longer slaves in Egypt -- however, most of them never arrived at the **provision** God promised them!

Our Christian walk should be something more than just repeated forgiveness for doing wrong all the time. It ought to be, first a *willingness* to do God's will regardless of the temptations, and then, *obedience* to it.

If we harden our hearts in the wilderness experience, the alternative may be our end - our bones bleaching in the wilderness - we will perish in the problem (temptation) and never come into the fullness of provision.

This does not mean a loss of salvation, God forgave the Israelites for their rebellion, **BUT** He refused to allow them to enter into the Promise-Land.

Note, how Moses pleaded with God to pardon their sins and God answered:

Numbers 14:20-23, "*The LORD replied, 'I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed Me and tested Me ten*

times - not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated Me with contempt will ever see it."

God forgave them! Though they did not lose their salvation, ***they lost the opportunity to receive the fulfillment of the promise!***

Their bones bleached in the wilderness. What a sad spectacle that was. They perished "spiritually." This is *our alternative IF*, we continually respond negatively to the problems (temptations) confronting us on our many laps around the wilderness. If there is continual resistance to God – (yielding to temptations) – we may come to a point of no return in God's dealings with us. Listen to this turning point in Israel's life:

"So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it - these men responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived. When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly. Early the next morning they went up toward the high hill country. 'We have sinned,' they said. 'We will go up to the place the LORD promised.' But Moses said, 'Why are you disobeying the Lord's command? This will not succeed! Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies'" (Numbers 14:36-42).

What a fearful thought! God forgave them - and God will forgive us, **BUT**, unless we allow Him to prepare us, that is, overcome temptations and accept fully His principles - **He cannot bring us into our Promise-Land!**

How tragic it is, Christians who know God's promises, spend their lives wondering in the wilderness – never overcoming their temptations – unable to ever see God's promises turned into provision. In the end, their bones bleached in the wilderness!

Enter the Promise Land!

The third alterative is to stand and enter into the Promise-Land. Only two of the Israelites of that first generation - Caleb and Joshua, received the fulfillment of this promise. They were the spies that had seen the fortified cities and the armed giants with their own eyes, **but they remembered God's promise** and were confident that He would deliver the land into their hands.

Forty years later, Joshua and Caleb led this new generation across the River Jordan into the Promise-Land!

When we fail on our first "*lap around*," – [our temptation] – there will be another opportunity to face the same principle [temptation]. God gives us another choice between standing on His Word – or refusing to obey Him.

Our problem is often we do not recognize a situation – as

"God's confrontation with a problem" so we continue to have it until we learn its lesson and trust in God's deliverance!

God is patient and permits us another lap and this continues until we have succeeded in the problem, or we become so hardened that another lap will make no difference whatsoever.

The laps become gradually more severe, or obvious, in order to bring a recognition of wrong reaction. God does not want to press us into a severe problem, just for hardship sake alone! If we can only understand the principle *and succeed in rejecting the temptation* to disobey the first time around, we are ready to *move right into the provision without delay*. God longs to show us that a difficult situation is always a doorway to the Promise-Land - when we are willing to meet His conditions!

HOW WE COME THROUGH THE PROBLEM - (our wilderness) - DEPENDS ON OUR RESPONSE TO TEMPTATION

(Remember: "*Temptation*" means "putting to the proof")

What is "*put to the proof*" is our willingness to be totally yielded and obedient to God's Word.

God gives us His Word (the Promise) and establishes His Principle in our understanding. Then, temptation comes (the Problem). During the time of temptation, God's Principle will always be questioned. - (That is the essence of what temptation is!)

The "*Temptation*" (or Problem) is our journey through the wilderness. Here, there is always the question of doubting God's Word or His intentions. Temptation always seeks to dishonor God!

Temptation came to Eve in the form of a question, "*Hath God said?*" Thus, the first question was designed to test Eve to see if she remembered what God had said (See Genesis 3:1-3).

If we know God's Word, Satan's question will throw doubt on the validity of God's Word, or His intentions, to do as He said!

Notice Satan's next approach to Eve in Genesis 3:4, "*You'll not die. God knows that as soon as you eat of the fruit, you will become like Him.*"

Satan got Eve to question God's character by saying to her, "*God doesn't want you to be as smart as He is, or to enjoy life as much!*"

Satan, through temptation, strikes at the heart of the matter and we are forced to make a decision. Will we believe God's Word and obey Him, or will we ignore God's Word and follow our own inclinations?

God allows circumstances to produce temptations to come into our life in order for us to face this question because, until it has been faced, there is always the possibility of "double-mindedness," "self-will," "ego" or "weakness," to be hiding in our heart.

This question must be faced and answered by all of us - and in all major areas of our life! God says, "*If you do these things that I command you, you will live and eat the good of the land.*"

We all have heard the same question that Eve heard - "*Did God really say that?*"
- *Those rules were made by a God Who is mean and doesn't want you to have fun!*"

Satan's question suggests that our own way is the easier and better way - while God's way is difficult, hard and could not possibly lead to the fulfillment of our dreams and ambitions.

While we are in the grips of temptation, this question will present itself in the form of deception, rationalization and excuses and we will find that our reason and our senses are likely to be in direct opposition to God's Word.

Temptation isn't real unless it involves the possibility of failure, a moment where we face the issue squarely and it is almost a toss-up, which way we will take? Temptation looks so sweet - so sensible - so logical - we are on the verge of trading what it offers for what God has said. When we have faced that kind of decision, and made the **right** choice, we have moved from "*lip service to God*" to wholehearted willingness to obey Him regardless of what it may cost.

Satan's questions will suggest a clever twisting of God's instructions. **Therefore, it is essential that we clearly understand what God says in the first place!** It is important that we familiarize our self with God's Word. It is our guidebook on our journey through the wilderness to the Promise-Land. If we follow the law of the "*Four P's,*" we need the Bible to check us at every point along the way.

CHECK THE PROMISES!

Is the promise that I am claiming - according to God's Word? We must not take a promise out of context or accept a personal promise that we assume is from God without checking it against the character and principle of the Bible.

It is possible to have a "*strong desire*" for something and ask God for it **with intensity**, even "*feel*" that God is telling us that He will grant our prayer, however, **that** is not enough! Always check your desire against what the Bible has to say. If your "*feeling*" is *inconsistent* with either God's character or God's Word - then the promise is a false one!

In checking God's promises, make sure you are not standing on the wrong promise. God will not promise you anything in contradiction to His own Word. Stand

on God's Word against your *feelings, emotions* and *rationalizations*. We must keep our eyes on Him instead of what our senses or reason tell us.

If we give in to the temptation to have a "poor me, pity party," we will only earn another lap through the problem"

When God says He will take us to a Promise-Land, we can only get there if we follow His instructions. Satan's questions will always suggest an alternate path, or method.

THE DELICATE BALANCE OF TEMPTATION

God gave Israel the *promise* and the *principle* and placed the *problem* as a preparation for receiving the *provision*.

Remember, the **4 P's - PROMISE, PRINCIPLE, PROBLEM and PROVISION**

As in Israel's experience, so with us. Central to the problem is temptation - with Satan's questions bombarding us, presenting us with the choice of obeying or disobeying God's Word.

Does God tempt man?

Many quote James 1:13 to prove that God does not tempt a man. This verse states, "*When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.*" What James 1:13 is saying is that **God never tempts a man to do wrong** [One translation renders this verse as: ". . . God never wants to do wrong and never tempts anyone else to do it."]

"Temptation" means to "put to the proof" -- for good or for malicious purpose.

GOD NEVER TEMPTS A MAN FOR MALICIOUS PURPOSE

However, God does tempt a man - (*puts him to the proof*) - for good purposes. God puts us to the test in order to prepare us to receive the good things He has promised us!

2 Chronicles 32:31 states, "*God left him (Hezekiah) to himself in order to test (tempt) him and to know everything that was in his heart - to see what he was really like.*"

The Bible says God "left" Hezekiah. How can this be consistent with the many passages stating that God will never leave us or forsake us? (Psalm 139:8-10, for instances) Yet, God "left" Hezekiah to test him and see what he was really like. We must come to see the difference between God's omnipresence and our *conscious* presence of Him.

God "left" Hezekiah only in the sense that He removed Hezekiah's awareness of His presence. God was still there, but Hezekiah could not "feel" Him . . . could not sense

Him.

If we "feel" God there with us all the time and have that wonderful assurance of His presence - we would never be tempted to distrust Him in the problem!

1. God gives us His **PROMISE**
2. God teaches us the **PRINCIPLE**
3. Then, God, at times, will withdraw an awareness of His presence and we enter the **PROBLEM**

The believer is faced with *temptation* and Satan's question . . . "Are you sure God cares about you?" The believer may answer, "Well, I think He does!" Satan counters with, 'But, you don't feel Him around anymore, do you?' The believers comes back with, "No . . . but . . ." Satan continues, "You see, God doesn't really care. He left you to yourself in the middle of this terrible situation, didn't He?"

HERE IS TEMPTATION IN DELICATE BALANCE. WHEN GOD WITHDRAWS OUR CONSCIOUSNESS OF HIS PRESENCE, AND PERMITS SATAN TO COME WITH HIS QUESTIONS.

If Eve had "felt" the presence of God in the Garden of Eden, there, no doubt, would not have been a problem. As she walked up to the tree, she would have heard God saying, "Now, Eve, remember, that's the tree I told you not to eat of. Be careful, because the beautiful creature with the smooth voice is the devil trying to make you disobey Me and get you into trouble."

God's purpose in withdrawing our consciousness of His presence is to make us face temptation and the question on the basis of His principle alone!

If the Israelites had "felt" the power of God's presence when Moses left them to go up on Mount Sinai, they would never have been faced with the temptation to make an image of a golden calf. If the children of Israel had a consciousness of God's presence was with them, assuring them, 'Here I am, My children. Don't worry. I'll always be with you and you will always be able to feel Me near you.'

If God is to reveal to us what is really in our hearts, He must withdraw from us the sense-experience of His presence. Then, Satan is permitted to go to work with questions - and we are in the middle.

THE BALANCE DEPENDS UPON US! We are forced to choose between Satan's questions and suggestions -- and God's Word! If we allow evil desires in our heart to rule and respond to Satan's suggestions, we will fail. Satan cannot succeed in drawing us away from God's instructions unless there is already a measure of "*double-mindedness*" in us. That indecisiveness is often all Satan needs to draw us away from God's instruction.

In John 14:30 Jesus said, "Satan is coming, and he has no claim on Me, he has nothing in common with Me, there is nothing in Me that belongs to him, he has no power over Me." - (Amplified Bible)

Satan only succeeds in tempting us in areas where we have something in common with him. There is where he has legal claim and can exert power. God wants to bring any such areas to the surface in order to cleanse them and fill us with His love...
... *temptation serves that purpose!*

James 1:13 states, "And remember, when someone wants to do wrong, it is never God who is tempting him, for God never wants to do wrong and never tempts anyone else to do it."

- GOD NEVER TEMPTS A MAN TO DO WRONG!

Verse 14 states, "Everyone is tempted when, by his own evil desire he is dragged away and enticed." Another translation renders:
"Temptation is the pull of man's own evil thoughts and wishes."

The "data" of evil thoughts and wishes one programs his mental computer with - is the very material Satan uses to draw him away from God's instructions!

GOD GIVES HIS **PROMISES**, EXPLAINS HIS WORKING **PRINCIPLE**, HOWEVER, WHENEVER WE GET INTO THE **PROBLEM**, GOD MAY REMOVE OUR AWARENESS OF HIS PRESENCE. **GOD SAYS**, "I WILL BE WITH YOU, HOWEVER, YOU WILL NOT ALWAYS BE AWARE OF IT. IT MAY SEEM AS IF YOU ARE ALONE, FACING THE TEMPTATION AND SATAN'S QUESTIONS WITHOUT MY PRESENCE. IT IS NECESSARY THAT I DO THIS THAT YOU MIGHT SEE WHAT I SEE IN YOUR HEART. I PROMISE YOU THAT - OVER IN THE PROMISE LAND YOU WILL ONCE AGAIN "FEEL" MY PRESENCE - (PROVISION).

Some believers are like to young man who, after going through the wedding ceremony, turned to his brand-new wife and said, "Honey, I don't feel married, do you?" To which she replied, "Dear, you'd better adjust your feelings to fit the facts."

When God allows us to sense His presence, it is on either side of the problem. In fact, the absence of a sensation of God's presence is one of characteristics of our time in the problem. If we panic during the time of our problem, (as did the Israelites), and cry out for God to come and change the situation, God may do just that, however, the result may be another lap around the mountain and an extended stay in the wilderness.

When God *seems* to withdraw His presence, Satan is allowed to come near with his questions. We stand in the delicate balance of temptation, and the outcome depends upon our decision. Satan's questions will always appeal to what is in our heart, and it can be a frightening thing to recognize what is hiding down there.

There is within everyone a certain curiosity about evil!

Before we can move into our Promise-Land we must be prepared – and the "goodness of God" becomes more evident through the circumstances that we face. What strength and assurance we gain as our eyes are opened to the possibilities that are ours as we move out into the promises of God.

WHAT IS THE "PROMISE LAND"?

Our "Promise-Land," that God promises today is not a geographical location, as it was in Exodus to the children of Israel, but, rather, it is a "spiritual reality." The "Promise-Land" is *a place of rest where we have ceased from our own labors and are able to enjoy the provisions God has made for us.*

God promised Israel that they would "*dwell in cities they didn't build, enjoy fruit from orchards they didn't plant, drink water from wells they didn't dig.*" God said, "*If you will obey My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then you will be a peculiar [valuable] treasure unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine; and you will be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.*"

WE ARE TO POSSESS THE "SPIRITUAL REALITY" OF THE PROMISE-LAND

The spiritual reality of the believer's "Promise-Land" is described in Romans 8!

- A life without guilt and condemnation
 - A life in joint heirs with Christ
 - All things work out for the believer's best
 - God will give the believer freely of all things
 - Living more than conquerors through Christ
 - Nothing separating the believer from God's love in Christ

The entire 8th chapter of Romans is a tremendous declaration of the victorious Christian life – living victoriously over all temptations – God has made available to us

The book of Romans gives a pattern demonstrated of the "**LAW OF THE 4 P's**"

Romans

PROMISE	PRINCIPLE	PROBLEM	PROVISION
Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 7	Chapter 8

1. THE PROMISE

Romans 5:17 states, "*For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man . . . [Adam] . . . how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.*"

The contrast *is* between sin and death reigning in our life, or righteousness and life. Which will it be?

The "promise" is that Christ's righteousness will enable us to reign in this life! His righteousness will enable us to reign over the circumstances in which we find our self - at home, work, in school, everywhere! We can reign amidst conflict, confusion and problems!

2. THE PRINCIPLE

How can the "promise" become a reality in our life? We are to "reign" through the One, Jesus Christ.

Romans 6:5-6, "*If we have been united with Him [Christ], like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.*"

Christ's righteousness reigning within us is made possible by what Christ has already accomplished for us. His substitutionary death for us is a past reality, an established fact. By accepting what Christ has done for us personally - we are indeed dead in the sense that our natural, sin-loving self no longer rules over us. We need not be a slave of sin. **WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE ABILITY TO CHOOSE!** The option is ours and the principle tells us how we can use it.

Romans 6:11-13, "*In the same way, count yourselves dead [unresponsive] to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves [completely] to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*"

Don't miss the action words here of what we must do . . . and what we must **not** do! Notice: "count yourselves" . . . "alive to God" . . . "do not let" . . . "offer yourselves completely" . . . "as instruments of righteousness."

We are to do basically two things: (1) Refuse to respond in the old way to sinful desires, and (2) Give our self totally to God.

Romans 6:16, "*Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"* (verse 19), "*Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.*"

Note: ". . . you must let yourself be slaves to all that is right and holy."

HOW DO WE BECOME SLAVES TO ALL THAT IS RIGHT AND HOLY?

It is not obtained by starting out to "try," in one's own efforts to be good! God has given another method, found in Romans 7:6: "*But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.*" Another translation renders this verse as: "*Now you need no longer worry about... the laws because you 'died' while in their captivity, and now you can really serve God, no in the old way, mechanically obeying a set of rules, but in the new way [with all of your hearts and minds].*"

Note: We are told that God has provided a way for us to do His will, a way to live within His law. We are to actively resist evil desires, and just as actively give our self wholeheartedly to God and **Christ will fulfill the law for us.**

Jesus said, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*"

[Matthew 5:17-19].

Jesus came to fulfill the law - to make it come true in us!

When the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans, that we are free from the law's demands, he did not mean to imply that the law was not valid anymore. He only meant that we need not struggle to keep the law in **our own strength**, because now we can put our self into God's hands and **let** Christ fulfill the law in our life!

Remember, the principle for Israel was - to inherit cities they didn't build, enjoy fruit they didn't plant and drink from wells they didn't dig!

WE MUST LET GOD DO FOR US WHAT WE CANNOT
POSSIBLY DO FOR OUR SELF, AND THAT INCLUDES
KEEPING THE LAW!

3. THE PROBLEM

Between the "*principle*" and the "*provision*" is the "*problem*" (some kind of temptation) in order to reveal any tendency in us to do our own thing instead of abiding by God's instructions.

In considering "*Why God Allows Temptations*" - we need to understand the tendency of our "*old selfish nature*" and why our spiritual struggle is necessary for spiritual growth.

The problem Paul describes is a common one for all of us. It is what happens once we have become aware of God's will and find our self incapable of doing it.

Romans 7:21-24, "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

What did the "problem" reveal in Paul?

Paul knew God's will and he wanted to do it, but he could not! There was a tendency to want to keep the law in his own strength. He once had been a Pharisee, and knew all about using will power to keep the rules and regulations.

You and I are self-willed people, set on being "good" in our own strength. We may not realize it, however, because this is a subtle rebellion - the desire to earn our own salvation - to be able to say, "Look at me, I'm keeping the law. I don't do this, and I don't do that!"

The dangerous trap of "rule-keeping" will keep us from ever enjoying the fulfillment of the law in the Promised-Land!

**GOD ALLOWS SITUATIONS WHERE OUR OWN EFFORTS
AT BEING GOOD WILL HOPELESSLY FAIL - IN ORDER
TO REVEAL THIS TENDENCY DEEP WITHIN US**

We struggle with hidden envy, pride, resentment, covetousness, or other powerful tendencies that keeps us bound and suffering in the "*wilderness*" of our particular problem. The predicament is, we know what God wants us to do but we are not able to do it!

Paul says in Romans 7:25, "Thank God! It has been done by Jesus Christ our Lord, He has set me free!"

The only way we can come through the wilderness (the problem, or temptation) into the provision is to let Jesus Christ do it!

This is the principle Paul embraced! When we find our self in the problem, we must apply the principle we have learned:

1. Recognize and admit our own failure
2. Resist the pull of wrong desires
3. Turn our self over to God to be used for His purpose.

Letting Jesus do God's perfect will in - and through - us, is the only way we can come through the wilderness into the "*Promise-Land*" of victorious living!

4. THE PROVISION

When:

1. We knowledge of the "Promise," and
2. Practice of the "Principle" has been . . .
3. Tested and refined through "Problems," we are
4. Able to enter the "Provision," the Promised-Land!

This Promise-Land for us is defined in the 8th chapter of Romans, where various "pieces" of the promised inheritance is found.

When Israel entered Canaan, they found that each piece of land to be "possessed" separately.

The principles and the problems had to come before each individual section of the land could become theirs.

Romans 8:1-4, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."

Note: (1) We live without condemnation

- (2) We are free from the vicious circle of sin and death, and
- (3) We are able to obey God's laws

These can become spiritual realities as we apply the principle:

- 1. Resist our old nature,**
- 2. Submit to God and**
- 3. let Christ live in - and for us.**

"*Problems*" will confront us with the temptation to do otherwise. Satan's questions will be aimed at us, "*What do you mean, no condemnation? You are guilty and you know it. Your not good enough, your not free from sin, and you certainly aren't obeying God's law! You better try a little harder to be good!"*

If we crumple and submit to guilt we will be forced to "*take another lap.*"

Instead of giving in to guilt feelings, we must practice God's principle and respond, "*I am guilty, however, Scripture teaches that Christ is without guilt, and it is His life in me that gives me right standing with God. I want to do God's will. I will not give in to my doubts and guilt-feelings. I trust Jesus to change me. I am NOT under condemnation. I am free from the vicious circle of sin and death, and I am obeying God's law in Christ - and this is true regardless of how often I slip or how guilty I feel.*"

Continuing with *Our provisions in Romans, chapter 8*

There are other "pieces" of our inheritance presented in Romans 8. Let's look at some of these wonderful provisions that is ours for the taking!

Romans 8:5, "*Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*"

4. God-pleasers.

We cannot please God no matter how hard we try! However, God has provided a way. If we will follow His instructions, we will find our self doing the things that pleases God, quite effortlessly!

Romans 8:6, "*The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*"

The Amplified Bible renders this verse as: "*Now the mind of the flesh [which is sense and reason without the Holy Spirit] is death - death that comprises all the miseries arising from sin. both here and hereafter. But the mind of the Holy Spirit is life and soul-peace [both now and forever].*

5. We can have life and soul-peace

We long for peace! Soul-peace is a peace that comes through our spirit, saturating our whole being: personality, mind, and emotions. Instead of feeling frustration, tension, worry or restlessness, this peace brings us quietness in the midst of a turbulent world. It is our inheritance - in Christ!

Romans 8:9, "*You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*"

6. The indwelling Holy Spirit can control us

It is possible to be a born-again, Christian, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and yet, not allow the Holy Spirit to control one's life. Control of the Holy Spirit is **not** an automatic feature of the Christian's life. The control of the Holy Spirit can only come as we give up our "self-will," resist the control of our lower nature and turns our self over completely to Christ's control.

This "control of the Holy Spirit" is not something that is done once and for all by a single decision, but, rather, it must be repeated **daily**, often in the heat of a problem!

Romans 8:11, "*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also*

give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."

7. The Spirit can quicken our mortal body

Here is a promise of divine "quicken," giving us new life, a new surge of energy.

Romans 8:13, "*For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*"

The Amplified Bible states, "*if through the power of the Holy Spirit you are habitually putting to death - making extinct, deadening - the [evil] deeds prompted by the body, you shall (really and genuinely) live forever.*"

8. We can put to death the evil deeds of to body

We are to habitually put to death - resist and deny - the old habits and turn our self over to Christ's control instead.

Romans 8:14, "*... because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*"

9. We can be lead by the Spirit of God

Romans 8:15, "*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'*"

The Amplified Bible states, "*For [the Spirit which] you have now received is not a spirit of slavery to put you once more in bondage to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption - the Spirit producing sonship - in [the bliss of] which we cry Abba! [that is,] Father!*"

10. We can know the spirit of adoption

Romans 8:16, "*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*"

11. The Spirit tells us we are God's child.

Romans 8:17, "*Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory.*"

12. We are "joint heir" with Christ Jesus

Romans 8:20-21, "*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*"

13. We can have glorious freedom from sin

Paul speaks of complete freedom from sin we will enjoy in the future, after the resurrection – however, he also speaks of our "substantial" freedom from sin which we can enjoy in this life!

Romans 8:23, "*Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*"

The Amplified Bibles states, "*And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us full rights as His children, including the new bodies He has promised us - bodies that will never be sick again and will never die.*"

14. We are promised the redemption of our body

This is to be experienced fully when Christ comes again, however, there is a measure of fulfillment even now. Our dying body can experience greater life!

Romans 8:26, "*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*"

15. The Spirit helps with our daily problems and prayers

Romans 8:28, "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.*"

16. Everything happens for our good

We must be careful when we quote this verse, "*all things work together for good,*" because, it is possible, that those who refuse to see their problem as a part of God's plan for good, will recite this verse to avoid facing what God is saying to them.

God's plan is to bring us from the Promise into the Provision, by way of the Problem. No problem – (or temptation) – can just "pop-up" and thwart God's intention, but, rather, it is inevitable part of God's divine plan.

*All that happens to us is meant to work for his good
- including the things that we have habitually called "bad."*

There springs from our "*old nature*" our reasoning and understanding without the Holy Spirit's enlightening. We must deliberately resist these old thought patterns – confess them as sin – and ask God to take them away and replace them with the ability to look at "*A-L-L*" things as a part of His good plan!

This ability is ours in Christ Jesus

Romans 8:29, "*For those God foreknew He also predestined to be*

conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers."

17. We are to be conformed to Christ's image

We cannot accomplish this by "trying" to be like Christ, but, rather, we can only be like Christ to the degree that Christ lives His life in us. Romans 8:31, "*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?*"

18. We can know that God is always on our side

We need never to feel alone. God is always on our side!

Romans 8:32, "*He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"*

19. God freely gives the believer all things!

Romans 8:34, "*Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*"

20. Christ will plead our cause

We must **not** remain stubborn in our self-sufficiency, but yield our self to Christ - to receive the full benefits of our provision.

Romans 8:35-36, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'*"

21. Nothing can keep Christ's love from us!

The list of circumstances is a very inclusive description of **any** wilderness area we might encounter. The temptation is for us to feel that God has left us or doesn't love us. On the contrary, it is only through very difficult circumstances that we learn to rely on God's constant presence and never-ending love.

Romans 8:37, "*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*"

22. We can be more than conquerors

The victory is already ours through Christ Jesus!

Romans 8:38-39, "*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

23. Nothing can separate us from God's love

HERE IS OUR "PROMISE-LAND" - WE ARE MEANT TO LIVE HERE! Many Christians share Paul's problem of Romans 7. They know what God wants them to do, however, they flounder in the problem - (or "*temptation*") - unable to obey!

The answer to the predicament is to quit "*trying*" so hard in their own strength and instead let Jesus do it for them.

When we learn to apply that principle to all of our problems, we can become a permanent resident in the Promise-Land!

CHRIST IN TEMPTATION

The Bible tells us that Jesus "*was tempted in every point as we are.*" Jesus' temptation was the same as ours!

Jesus, too, was given the **PROMISE**, taught the **PRINCIPLE**, then God withdrew from His Son the consciousness of His presence, and Jesus as exposed to all the forces of hell. Jesus endured the **PROBLEM**. Satan's questions were thrown at our Lord before He could receive His Father's **PROVISION**.

The temptation of Jesus would not have been real *had it not contained the possibility of failure!* Anything less would have been contrary to the principles of God.

The Israelites were chosen of God to enter the Promised Land, yet they failed to come into their full provision. Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, **could**, conceivably, have failed as well!

Notice in the Gospels that the temptation of Jesus occurred immediately *after* Jesus had been baptized in the Jordan River and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and *before* He entered His ministry as Messiah.

Failure in the **PROBLEM** wouldn't have changed the fact that He was God's Son who had been filled with the Holy Spirit, but it would have adversely affected His role as Messiah - His **PROVISION**!

To think, "*If I could only be full of the Holy Spirit, then I would not have any more problems,*" is a mistake many believers make!

As we look at the life of Jesus, we see God wants every believer to be emptied of "self" and "filled with His Holy Spirit." Whenever one prays to be filled with the Holy Spirit, they shouldn't expect that their problems will all melt away, but, rather, expect **new** problems.

The infilling of the Holy Spirit is the potential (or *promise*), however, this promise

must be put to the test before the believer can safely come into his provision!

When a spaceship is built, before it can take off for outer space, it is tested under full power, to see if all systems are go. If any defects show up during the test, the part is repaired or exchanged.

When God fills us with the Holy Spirit, we are put to the test to see if our systems are all "go," then we will be ready to be launched into the mission God has for us!

Scripture establishes the fact that Jesus was well acquainted with God's Word (the **PROMISE**)! When He was baptized in water, He was also, "*filled with the Holy Spirit,*" however, the preparation for His ministry was not complete.

Luke 3:21-22, "*When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased."*" Luke 4:1-2, "*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days He was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them He was hungry.*"

Jesus, after just being baptized in water and filled with the Holy Spirit, was "driven" by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan!

Many feel that because they experience an infilling of the Holy Spirit that they are ready and prepared for "*doing the work of the God,*" and fail to see that **a trip to the wilderness and a confrontation with the enemy - (temptation) - is a necessary part of their preparation for ministry!**

Jesus was in the wilderness, alone with Satan, for forty days and nights without eating, and the Bible says He was hungry. God, the Father, had withdrawn the consciousness of His presence from Jesus.

1

SATAN'S FIRST TEMPTATION - CAME IN THE REALM OF PHYSICAL PROVISION

It had to do with Jesus' very real hunger pains, His feelings of fatigue and discomfort. Satan presented the question, "*If you are God's Son, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread.*" Jesus knew He was the Son of God and perfectly capable of turning that stone into bread, and He was extremely hungry, however, more than hunger was at stake here. Satan was suggesting that Jesus use His power *to satisfy His own need*, implying that His greatest need was for bread.

Satan was suggesting, "*Jesus, use your power to bring temporary satisfaction.*" The temptation was for Jesus to think of "self," and use His authority to ask for blessings

from a selfish motive.

Satan suggest to the believer, "You need a bigger house, a better job, more money, and God will be glorified when you prosper, so go ahead and ask for these stones to be turned to bread."

Jesus' answer to Satan was, "It is written in the Scriptures: `Other things in life are more important than physical bread.'"

Jesus chose to remain hungry, thereby, being obedient to God's Word, rather than to satisfy His own physical need by provoking God.

You will notice that Jesus quoted from the Scriptural account when the Israelites, in the wilderness; were tested in the same way that Jesus was being tested, however, they failed!

The account is found in Deuteronomy 8:2-3, it states,

"Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."

The Israelites gave in to temptation and begged for bread and, as a consequence, they were unable to enter into the Promised Land, however, Jesus, in the wilderness, won the victory and the provision.

Luke 4:2 states, "...He was hungry." Satan, knowing this temporary vulnerability, moved in for an attack on Jesus' physical need.

Wasn't bread a valid solution to a personal problem?

In this study, "*Why God Allows Temptation*" - showing God's process of entering into God's Promise-Land of provision, we must not miss this important principle:

The true purpose of God's miraculous power is not to bring temporary satisfaction. The "physical" (or "natural") purpose of God's performing a miracle is, of itself, not the significant thing, but, rather, the true significance of any miracle can only be understood by "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God!"

In our journey through the "wilderness" to God's Promise-Land, we must not yield to the temptation to become spiritually irresponsible - in an attempt to circumvent God's true purpose in favor of a supernatural display of power to meet our needs.

THIS IS A VERY REAL DANGER!

Remember this: "*Miracles, in themselves, are not what is significant, but, rather, their significance lies in a knowledge and understanding of Divine truth!*" God, of course, performs miracles today, however, the question is, not "does" God perform miracles today, but "why" does God perform miracles?

God's promises are not given in order for the believer to see how far he can stretch them, but, rather, they are given, so that, while in the normal course of the believer's Christian living, he is in a situation of extreme circumstance, then his extremity becomes God's opportunity to supply his needs.

Let me illustrate:

Let's say that a certain highway has a sharp curve at the point where there is a deep precipice, so the Highway Department has placed a fence along the curve in order to protect anyone driving along that stretch of road.

What is one supposed to do? Are they to get as large a truck as possible, fill it with a heavy load, and then drive it at a high speed into the retaining wall just to try and see if the "*promising possibilities*" of the fence is true or not?

No, of course not! The fence is put there to protect anyone from any *unusual* circumstances, and, in the event that someone is driving along that road and a tire blows, bouncing the off the retaining fence, the fence **will** prevent the car from going over the precipice!

WHAT ARE MIRACLES?

A miracle is a "*supernatural*" phenomenon occurring that is contradictory to the normal laws of nature. God does not perform miracles **just to satisfy a physical need one might have!** Of course, wheat grown in the field to provide bread is a *miraculous* working of God, however, because this is within God's "*natural*," established, laws of nature, is not considered a "*miracle*."

The book of Hebrews speaks of our spiritual growth. The main message of this book of Hebrews is our development of a Christ-like character.

Hebrews 2:3 states, "*How shall we escape if we ignore . . . [neglect, disregard, lay aside, pay no attention to] . . . such a great salvation?*" (That is, this spiritual development that God seeks to work out in our life). The verse continues, "*This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.*" Verse 4 states, "*God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.*"

Miracles were to fulfill God's *purpose*, to demonstrate God's *purpose*, not His power.

Satan's first temptation to Jesus in the wilderness was to draw His attention to His "physical" need - (bread). This loses sight of His Father's purpose and kingdom.

Satan would be delighted if the believer would get so interested in miracles and a display of God's power, that he loses sight of God's purpose and kingdom!

Another interesting fact is found in Hebrews 11, where the great "*heros*" of faith are mentioned, one looks in vain to find even a few miracles mentioned in their lives. What one does see is that their faith was tested in their ability to endure cruel afflictions. They did not even "*see*" the results of their faith in this life, or even any evidence of the receiving the promises **in this life!**

Hebrews 11:36-40 states, "*Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated - the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*"

God does perform miracles today in supplying needs, however, He is not at our beck and call to perform miracles on demand. He has a purpose behind each one, and that is the advancement of His kingdom.

2

SATAN HAS ANOTHER MEANS OF HIS TEMPTATION OF JESUS, AND THAT WAS TO PUT "MATERIAL THINGS" OF THIS EARTH AHEAD OF ONE'S WORSHIP OF GOD

Speaking of the second *temptation* of Jesus, Luke 4:5-7 states, "*The devil led Him up to a high place and showed Him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And said to Him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be Yours.'*"

Who and what a man worships is the final test of his heart.

Satan knew Jesus' appointed role as Messiah and ultimate ruler of the world, however, he also knew that Jesus had to go by the "*way of the cross*," the way of suffering, rejection and death. Therefore, in this second temptation, Satan offered Jesus a *compromise*, an easy way out.

This was no *easy* temptation for Jesus to face. He was alone in the wilderness, tired, hungry and not conscious of the presence of His heavenly Father. Satan appeared

in all his power, beauty and light and he made this temptation as appealing as he possibly could. *Doesn't Satan always?*

Jesus' reply to this second temptation was, "*It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only*" (Luke 4:8). Again, replying to this second temptation, Jesus refers to the Scripture record of the Israelites in the wilderness.

This passage is found in Exodus 20:2-3, and reads, "*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me.*"

In the context of this passage of Exodus 20, Israel was exposed to temptation when they no longer "sensed" God's presence with them, and so, they disobeyed God's command to worship Him *only* and to have *no other* gods before Him, and they worshiped the golden image of a calf.

They failed and lost God's provision, however, Jesus obeyed God's Word and won the believer's provision!

This second temptation of Jesus in the wilderness was a valid offer Satan made to Jesus because Satan is the "*prince of this world*," the "*god of this world*" the "*prince and power of the air*," and "*the whole world lieth in wickedness*." Satan does have limited ownership of this earth. - (Dominion of this earth was given to Adam and Eve by God, however, they turned it over to Satan when they decided to obey him) - This Satan offers to Jesus if He would bow down and worship Him.

All the pull of Satanic magnetism was there in this temptation!

Satan can "*trip up*" the believer in his journey into God's Promise-Land by getting him to focus his attention on things other than God's kingdom. If we would posses our Promise Land we must put God first in our life and worship Him only!

Jesus did not get involved in some philosophic discussion, nor ask for any opportunity to "*think it over*." Without any compromise, Christ responded instantly and straightforward. His answer was clear, total and final. He said, "*No, Get thee behind Me, Satan; for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.'*"

In this second temptation, Satan was saying, "*The way to gain the kingdoms of the world is to worship him*," however, Jesus answered, '*The path to real fulfillment is to turn your life over to the Living God!*"

We see in these temptations of Jesus in the wilderness:

1. Satan attacks the believer in the realm of attempting to use God for his own personal, physical, needs.

2. And, Satan attacks the believer in the area of "*worshipping*" material things around him, instead of putting God first in his life.

3

We, now, come to a third temptation of Satan:

Luke 4:9-12, "The devil led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If You are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' Jesus answered, 'It says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test!'"

Satan takes his Scriptural reference out of context. This is perhaps the most subtle and dangerous form of temptation for sincere believers . . . *the suggestion that there is Scriptural authority for the proposed action!*

Satan suggested to Jesus that He do something spectacular to demonstrate His supernatural power and impress people! For Jesus to jump off the high pinnacle of the Temple roof and be carried to the pavement below by God's angels could certainly launch His mission on earth in a spectacular way.

What was wrong with this suggestion?

Thousands of people were gathered in the Temple courtyard and would probably be in a "*religious*" state of mind. They, certainly would be deeply impressed, to say the least.

This temptation seemed to be on such a high spiritual plane!

WAS THE PROMISE SATAN QUOTED A VALID PROMISE?

The Scripture Satan quoted comes from Psalms 91:11, where God does promise protection and help to those in impossible circumstances. This 91st Psalm, certainly, has been a source of solace to many in time of need, so what is so wrong with Satan's suggestion?

The problem was this; *Satan takes a valid promise of God and moves it into the realm of the spectacular!* Satan tempted Jesus by saying, "Make a grandstand play . . . become a 'superstar' by making a lasting impression. This is the way (the key) to success in ministry."

There is a big difference in, "*resting in the Lord*" as the Source of his ultimate confidence, and exploiting God's promises in an attempt to show how strong one's faith is. This second frame of mind will damage one's own soul and hurt the faith of others.

God will "supply my needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus," but **only God's omniscience knows my needs!**

This third temptation of Satan was for Jesus to do a spectacular, unusual, unnatural . . . and quite unnecessary . . . act!

God does provide miraculously, however, for instance, when Jesus fed the five thousand, He didn't do it in a spectacular or unnatural manner. He *could* have turned the stones on the hillside into bread, but, instead He quietly took the loaves and fishes, thanked God for them, and proceeded to divide them among the hungry.

The whole process appeared so natural and simple that those who watched hardly realized a miracle was taking place.

The point is, our human nature just naturally is drawn to the sensational and we must guard against this tendency for the spectacular, directing our desire to see God move in our lives. Satan would rob us of the true move of God by attempting to get us to substitute it with some dramatic event.

The drama of the glitter, glimmer and sparkle that occupies center stage of the secular world can effect the believer's attitude toward God's work and how he feels God should work. He can be, if he is not careful, be drawn toward the spectacular in the demonstration of God's power.

Sincere believers can be drawn into fanaticism of one kind or another, claiming isolated Scripture texts as God's direction for their actions. They look for strange and unusual so-called "*miracles*" as signs of spirituality.

How can the believer tell whether or not an "*urge to do something*" which appears to be "*spiritual*" comes from God, Satan, or is just his own desire?

Questions to ask concerning miracles:

1. Is it in line with God's total program as revealed in the Scripture?
Does it reflect God's character of love and justice?
2. Is it spectacular, unusual or unnatural? If so, be careful because God most often works in simple, natural and intelligible ways.
3. Has God prepared you for it? God does not usually act on the spur of the moment, His Word and intentions are unchanging and eternal.
When God wants you to do something, He will prepare you over a period of time, through Scripture, circumstances and impressions.
When the time for action comes, you will recognize that God has led you.
4. Is it necessary? This may seem to be a superfluous question, however,

the temptation to engage in unnecessary activities "*for the Lord*" (?) is a common one.

When Jesus answered this, Satan's third temptation, He said, "*Do not put the Lord you God to a foolish test.*" He again refers to a Scriptural record where the Israelites were in the wilderness. In the passage of Scripture which Jesus refers to, is where the Israel had been warned not to put God to a foolish test (to "*tempt*" Him), and, again, Israel failed; they asked for a sign that was not God's will - something more spectacular and sensational than what God's plan was - and they "*provoked*" God and lost their provision as a result of it.

Remember, God's dealings with Israel are our example to learn from - 1 Corinthians 10:6

Jesus was tempted *in the same realms* as the children of Israel, however, Jesus won! Where they lost, **He won!** Throughout the temptations, Jesus did what they had been instructed to do. He stood on the "*promises*" of God without the conscious awareness of God's presence. When we are tempted, we must do likewise!

In considering this third temptation of Satan to attempt to get Jesus to rely on the spectacular to impress people, let me add something else

It seems many have ceased to believe in the power of prevailing prayer and absolute trust in God to do His work through us, and are depending on public relation promotion! Some have even hired public relation firms, to tailor their image for the news media, to impress the multitudes. Isn't this falling into Satan's temptation of attempting, through the spectacular, to do the work of God?

Jesus' name is famous and known around the world today. He does have "*fame*," not because He "*cast Himself off the Temple*," but, rather, because He gave Himself to fulfill the purpose of God for His life, that of going to the cross and dying for the world. And, that is the **only** way anyone will ever find true fulfillment!

The New Testament is full of calls for diligence and carefulness, lest Christians get the reputation of being fools whose foolishness is based on a false view of Scripture. Some have excused their laziness and irresponsibility by saying, "*They are living by faith*," however, that it is not faith they are exercising, but, rather, they are "*tempting the Lord God*" . . . expecting some spectacular display of God's power to meet their needs.

God give us wisdom and discernment to know the difference between "*faith*" and just plain old human "*presumption*."

- Faith will produce marvelous results in the lives of people!

- Presumption will produce nothing but spiritual disaster!

The reason for the obscurity and deficiency of spiritual discernment, is due to a lack of knowledge of God's Word - His true promises!

1. GOD'S PROMISES MUST NEVER BECOME A SUBSTITUTE FOR FAITHFULNESS

God's Word tells us, "*All things are yours.*" Can that then mean, we can take anything from anyone we want? Of course not, God says we must "*work to support ourselves and our families,*" and we are also told we must be industrious.

God has also promised to "*feed the birds,*" however He does not drop the food in their nest, they must go out and scratch for it.

2. OUR INTERPRETATION OF GOD'S PROMISES MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH THE WHOLE OF SCRIPTURE

It is possible to revere the promises of God, more than the God Who gave them! One can lose sight of the Person because his eyes are filled with His gifts.

A.B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, wrote,

Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord
 Once it was the feeling, now it is the Word;
 Once His gift I wanted, now the Giver own;
 Once I sought for healing, now Himself alone,
 Once 'twas painful trying, now 'tis perfect trust
 Once a half salvation, now the uttermost!
 Once 'twas ceaseless holding, now He holds me fast
 Once 'twas constant drifting, now my anchor's cast.

Once 'twas busy planning, now 'tis trustful prayer;
 Once 'twas anxious caring, now He has the care;
 Once 'twas what I wanted, now what Jesus says,
 Once it was constant asking, now 'tis ceaseless praise

Once it was my working, His it hence shall be;
 Once I tried to use Him, now He uses me;
 Once the power I wanted, now the Mighty One;
 Once for self I labored, now for Him alone.

Once I hoped in Jesus, now I know He's mine;
 Once my lamps were dying, now they brightly shine;
 Once for death I waited, now His coming hail;
 All my hopes are anchored safe within the veil.

The only way through the "*problem*" (your wilderness, or temptation) is total reliance on God and His Word (the promises). There is no other assurance of help!

God's Word is sufficient! It is, therefore, essential that we be sure of what God has told us in the first place.

Nothing is more tragic than the Christian who stands on "a" word of God, taken out of context and twisted by the master deceiver (Satan).

When Satan left Jesus in the wilderness, **God sent angels to care for Him!** [Jesus had been in the wilderness without a sense of the presence of God.] When the angels came to care for Him - the sense of God's concern, love and presence *returned*. Luke 4:14 states, "then Jesus returned to Galilee, full of the Holy Spirit's power . . ."

Note: In Luke 4:1, Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit . . . Who led Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, now, after the time of testing, He was full of the Holy Spirit's power (verse 14).

Now, Jesus was ready to enter into the *provision* . . . the ministry God had for Him. He was on the "*victory side*" of the *problem*, and could announce to the world that He had come to fulfill what the Scripture promised - (Luke 4:16-21).

WHERE IS THE POWER JESUS PROMISED US TODAY?

Where is the ability to meet the need of the oppressed, the sick, the blind and the brokenhearted?

Power, as a *promise*, isn't the same as power in action! Between the *Promise* and the realization of power comes the *Principle* and the *Problem*.

VICTORY IN THE PROBLEM TRANSFORMS THE PROMISE INTO POWER

If we lack power, it isn't because God has withheld His promise or broken His Word, but, rather, it is because we have not come through our problems *victoriously!*

The "*power*" promised is dissipated by repeated laps around the mountain.

Jesus withstood the temptations in the wilderness and because He did, *the way is open for us to do the same!*

We can, also, stand on the "*Principle*" of God's "*Promise*," and be prepared to receive the fullness of the power of the Holy Spirit.

The power is promised to us, not in our own strength, **but in Christ's**

THE SERPENTS IN THE WILDERNESS

Temptation in the wilderness serves the purpose of exposing what is really in the believer's heart and is necessary before we can have an honest and satisfactory relationship with God and reach the maturity by which we enter into the provisions of the Promise-Land!

Remember Deuteronomy 8, when God tells Israel why He led them through the wilderness?

"Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands . . . Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today"

Deuteronomy 8:2, 12-18.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Don't bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One" (Matthew 6:13).

God does lead us into temptation in order to reveal what is in our heart. Our prayer should be, "Oh, God, let there be nothing in my heart that would cause You to put me to the test." If there is any unconfessed sin, or Satan's thoughts of temptation that we allow to stay, Satan has an open door.

God allows a "Ways and Means Committee" in the wilderness, especially assigned to bring out our weaknesses. In Israel's situation, God allowed "serpents" to tempt the children of Israel in the wilderness and lead them to perish there. As one studies God's Word, he will realize that the areas of Israel's temptation are major areas where we will be tested to a greater or lesser degree.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 states, "For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Let's take a look at these various temptations mentioned in the children of

Israel's life and see how they may apply to our Christian walk.

1.

1 Corinthians 1:6, "Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did."

The children of Israel craved meat, although they were being fed adequately every day with manna from heaven. They complained until God became angry. To teach them a lesson, God sent an over abundance for them to eat -- until they became nauseous.

A desire, or craving, for anything other than God, amounts to rejection of Him and, to teach us that God may allow an over abundance of what the believer craves.

[What an effective cure -- to get sick on what one craves for]

Until we are cured of all inordinate desires for anything other than God and His purposes, we will live a life of continual double-mindedness and dissatisfaction.

It just may be that, like the children of Israel, God may provide the opportunity for us to satisfy that desire, expose it to where we will either:

1. Give in to the desire and suffer continued laps in the problem, or
2. Confess it, resist it, and choose to give his full allegiance to what God wants for us -- then, we will be ready to receive the provision.

2.

1 Corinthians 10:7, "Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry!'"

"*Idolatry*" is lust, or desire, that has come to maturity. This serpent poses a more serious threat than the first serpent. We are told to "*love the Lord your God with all your heart and with your entire being and will all your might*" Deuteronomy 6:5.

God, knowing the weakness in the hearts of the children of Israel, permitted them to be exposed to temptation. He had commanded them to love and worship Him only and to keep from making any molten images. Then, God withdrew from their conscious awareness of His presence through the person of His spokesman. He had Moses go up on the mountain. Immediately, the weakness in the children of Israel's hearts came to the surface with full force and they implored Aaron to make them a golden image of a calf to worship.

The molten calf represented the image of Egypt's god -- the bull, "Osiris." These ex-slaves cherished the dream of Egypt in their hearts, and whenever they were confronted with a temptation in the wilderness, their first impulse was to go back to the flash-pots they had left behind. This calf was no small thing, it was a sign of Egypt, showing that the children of Israel had withdrawn their allegiance from the invisible Jehovah and was placing it in Osiris to keep from being slain by the Egyptian army.

IDOLATRY INVOLVES ALLEGIANCE TO ANYTHING OTHER THAN GOD!

Idolatry starts out innocently enough. In the heart is a temptation to identify with something other than God and God permits us to be tempted with opportunities because to go on with divided loyalty is a frustration, both to us and to God.

Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back (to the things behind) is fit for the kingdom of God" Luke 9:32.

God requires full allegiance, or, we will be left with empty promises and consequently lose the spiritual provision - and the joy - God has promised.

3.

1 Corinthians 10:8, "We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did - and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died."

This phrase "sexual immorality," ("fornication," in the King James Translation) is an all-inclusive word, meaning all types of sexual sins, perversion and promiscuity.

Israel ignored God's command and committed sexual sins with the women of Moab. God's anger was aroused and a plague struck down 23,000 of Israel's number.

4.

1 Corinthians 10:9, "We should not test the Lord, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes."

The Israelites complained in the wilderness and said they hated "*the insipid manna*" which God had provided for them and, as a result, God sent poisonous snakes among them and many were bitten and died.

We test God's patience when we demand more than the adequate supply God has given. We test, or tempt, the Lord when we are not satisfied with what God has provided for our life and we cry out for something else that we think would be better than what God has provided for us.

We test God when we ask for a "sign" from Him after God has already made something clear, or, we ask God to prove His power when God has already shown enough to establish faith. Our faith must be based upon God's promises. To put God "to the proof" is an expression of doubt and dissatisfaction in our heart.

5.

1 Corinthians 10:10, "And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel."

The Israelites' complaints had hardened into open rebellion and a revolt was started against Moses and God slew the rebels.

Murmuring is perhaps the most dangerous of all the serpents in the wilderness. A habit of complaining becomes a constant attitude of discontent! Many complain about circumstances, and that is bad enough, but "murmuring" is directed against God.

The murmurer is a pessimist! No matter how things are, he always expects the worst. He feels he has been treated unfairly by God -- life, his wife, neighbors, his boss and so on. This negative attitude is demonstrated by a constant stream of criticism directed at everyone and everything.

1 Corinthians 10:11, "*These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.*"

Every believer will face these five temptations . . . *lust, idolatry, fornication, tempting God and murmuring . . .* in the wilderness of his problems!

There is the danger of thinking that our personal situation is somehow unique and, therefore, exempt from God's rules and principles, however, God's Word assures us that this just isn't so!

1 Corinthians 10:12-13, "*So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*"

THERE IS NO UNIQUE SITUATION THAT PROVIDES AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULES IN GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US!

The situations that we go through have been faced by others, and are known by God.

1 Corinthians 10:13, teaches, ". . . no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for He has promised this and will do what He says!"

Temptation is never meant to break us, but, rather, it is means to bring out in us what needs to be exposed. We can stand up against any temptation - (That is God's promise!) - even if the problem appears to be overwhelming. The strength of Jesus Christ can take us through to victory!

When things get rough, we are provided with an escape! ". . . He (God) will show you how to escape temptation's power so that you can bear up patiently against it" (verse 13).

The only way to the "Promise-Land" is to come successfully through the "Problem" on faith in God's "Promise" alone!

The "Principle" is to yield our self completely to Christ. The "Promise" is that Christ will supply the strength that will take us through the "Problem."

Christ is the only One who ever gained complete victory in temptation, and that victory is ours when we are properly related to Him!

HOW TO POSSESS THE LAND

When the Israelites finally left the wilderness and crossed over the River Jordan into the Promised Land, they faced a reality that we, as "spiritual children of God" tend to forget.

THE LAND WAS TILL IN POSSESSION OF THE ENEMY!

There were enemy nations, giants and fortified cities in the land! We may enter the Promise-Land, however, that does not mean that we are in full possession of it!

Instant possession of the "Promise-Land," or immediate spiritual maturity, is *impossible!* Of course, God would be capable of giving "spiritual maturity" at once, however, the reason God does not is because if He did we would be destroyed. Listen to what Moses said to the children of Israel:

"When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations - seven nations larger and stronger than you - Do not be terrified by them, for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God" [Deuteronomy 7:1,21].

Our "Promise-Land" is, also, is only "a little at a time" because we must have time to grow in the ability to possess it!

Peter had to learn the necessity of "possessing the Promise-Land - little by little." He thought himself ready to enter the land and possess it all, IMMEDIATELY! The result: He fell flat on his face!

For three years he has been a disciple of Jesus. The Master Teacher had given him solid training in the "principles of God." Jesus, on the evening of His betrayal, stated a promise to His followers . . . "Because you have stood by Me in My trials, I confer on you a kingdom, just as My Father conferred one on Me, so that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" Luke 22:28-30

Jesus was explaining what was about to happen after He returns to earth, however, it also has reference to the believer's "reigning in life" in the Promise-Land of today - right now - in this life!

Note the verses that follow. Jesus continues to speak . . . "Simon, Simon, Satan has

asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" Luke 22:31-32.

Jesus said that Satan would be permitted to come near Simon because he needed to be exposed to temptation. In Simon's heart was something that had to be put to the test before he could enter the Promise-Land!

After Peter had been tested, he would be able to strengthen and build up the faith of his brothers in Christ. If Peter was to become what Jesus wanted him to be, he had to be exposed to the problem - his "*wilderness*."

The believer must go through the same "*testing*." Jesus is pleading the believer's cause and praying that his faith will not fail, however, Jesus does not pray that the believer be "*kept from*" the problem.

In training our children, we need to teach them about life and about making choices between right and wrong, because there will come a time when they will be exposed to temptation and have to make choices on their own.

As parents, we, sometimes, watch as our children get into situations where we know they will be tested, however, we cannot always decide the outcome, we only pray, as Jesus prayed for Peter, that their faith will not fail.

Listen to Peter's reaction to Jesus' statement . . . "*But he replied, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.'*"

Peter's pride and self-sufficiency responded by saying, in essence, "*I am Your most loyal disciple, I really don't need Your prayers.*" Peter assumed he was ready for any trial because he felt strong and spiritually capable to meet whatever might come along.

Back to 1 Corinthians 10 . . .

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" 1 Corinthians 10:12

When we "*feel*" strong in our self and are no longer fully dependant upon Christ for our strength . . . we forget our need of Christ's strength . . . we will stumble!

Jesus knew what lay ahead for Peter, and He continues . . . "*Jesus answered, 'I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know Me.'*"

Peter sincerely felt he was ready to go to jail or be killed for the Lord, he was eager and anxious to "*prove*" his loyalty, however, *he failed!*

Isn't it true, we often want to go out and do something heroic to further the

kingdom of God? We accelerate our "*will-power*" and engage in frantic activities "*for the Lord*," however, that is not the way God does things.

God does call some believers sometimes to do what appears to be dangerous . . . to risk their lives on a mission field or some other daring act . . . but, not until they have learned "*yielded obedience*" in the small things of daily stewardship.

Peter wanted an "*outward*" battle with a recognizable enemy, but Jesus warned him of the battle "*within*" his heart.

Luke 22:56-62 tells of the events that followed Jesus' arrest and early morning trial. A servant girl noticed Peter in the light of the fire, and said . . . "*This man was with Jesus.*" Peter denied it. "*Woman,*" he said, "*I don't even know the man.*" After a while someone else looked at him and said, "*You must be one of them.*" "*No sir, I am not!*" Peter replied. About an hour later someone else flatly stated, "*I know this fellow is one of Jesus' disciples, for both are from Galilee.*" But Peter said, "*Man, I don't know what you are talking about!*" And as he said the words, a rooster crowed. At the moment Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered what He had said, "*Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny Me three times.*" And Peter walked out of the courtyard, crying bitterly.

There was no condemnation, but only compassion and understanding in Jesus' loving eyes. However, Peter saw himself in those eyes, stripped of all pretense, totally unworthy of his Lord's trust. He also realized that Jesus had known all along of his weakness, and had loved him in spite of it.

Peter died a thousand deaths that morning, crying tears of repentance, emptying his spirit of the boasting, brashly, of his own strength. Peter had fallen, **but his faith did not fail!**

Peter may have remembered the words from Psalm 37:23-24, which states,

"If the LORD delights in a man's way, He makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with His hand"

Peter had "*a disposition*" to do God's will. He did not perish in the problem (his wilderness). This temptation had been necessary to expose the pride and self-sufficiency that had to go before Peter could become totally dependant upon God.

The "*old*" Peter wanted to rush in and possess the entire Promise-Land at once, however, the "*new*" Peter knew the need for "*steady growth*" in the faith. He had learned how to strengthen and build up the faith of his brothers so that they would not make the same mistakes he had made.

Peter, writing to the converts of the first century some years later, says . . .

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours . . . Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." 2 Peter 1:1,4.

THIS IS OUR "PROMISE-LAND!"

. . . and Peter tells us how it is to be possessed - "*little by little!*"

Christ-like Characteristics

Peter tells us in verses 5 through 7, of 2 Peter, of nine Christ-like characteristics which must be cultivated - in order to possess the Promise-Land. We will become partakers of the "*divine nature*" of Christ by . . .

1. DILIGENCE

We must be persistent, stick to it, work at it. And remember, that it isn't our own work, but rather, persistence is clinging to Christ who works *in* us. Use diligence to exercise *faith*.

2. FAITH

We must employ every effort to exercise faith. Settle in our heart the essence of faith as given in Hebrew 11:1, ". . . *faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see, and the conviction of their reality - faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses.*" - Amplified

Faith exercised will develop in our *virtue*.

3. VIRTUE

Virtue means doing it right. We should not take a short cut.. Virtue is excellence, true goodness, uprightness, resolution and Christian energy. We are to practice virtue to develop *knowledge*.

4. KNOWLEDGE

We lean to know God better and discover what He wants us to do. He is to seek out God's will for us, which comes from a study of the Bible. We are not to spend our life being spoon-fed by others, but, rather, learn how to study God's Word - [with a good Bible dictionary and concordance] - We must grow up in our personal knowledge of God, His ways and His Word. In practicing what we know about God's ways and wants for us, we develop *self-control*.

5. SELF-CONTROL

What causes one to lose control? The answer is, it is one's stubborn self-will.

We get angry when *our will* is opposed, *our comfort* disturbed, *our opinion* questioned. The problem is always our giant-sized ego. How can we practice self-control? Certainly, not by gritting our teeth and saying, "*I won't get angry any more!*" Our self will be controlled when we put aside our own desires, die to our ego, and let Jesus control us. When our self is controlled by Christ, we will learn the real meaning of the word, "*self-control.*" When this happens, we will develop *patience*.

6. PATIENCE

Patience is steadfast endurance in all circumstances and only develops as it is practiced. Practicing steadfast patience leads to *godliness*.

7. GODLINESS

This word, "*godliness*," is a word with many implications. An important one is impartiality or justice. God is totally just and impartial. We can measure our godliness by the way we treat our enemies. Do we love them like we do our friends? If we were God and had some rain to give, on whom would we send it? Would we send rain on the just *and* the unjust? The ability to be impartial is a mark of godliness. As we practice godliness, we develop *brother affection*.

8. BROTHERLY AFFECTION

We are to put aside the old reactions to people we dislike. We yield our self to Christ. We are to let Christ's affection, Who loves all men as brothers, flow through us. Practicing brotherly affection will develop *Christian love*.

9. CHRISTIAN LOVE

Christian love is the final step on our ladder of preparation to possess the Promise-Land. Christian love is "*agape-love*," the highest form of love - a reasoning, intentional, deliberate, spiritual devotion for others. This is not an emotional feeling - variable as the wind - but a steady, unchanging affection.

The natural love, which most humans are capable of, is always directed toward something or someone they like, they are attracted too, and approve of. "*Agape-love*" is the nature of God's love. God loves us when we are ugly, wrong and rebellious. Admittedly, it is impossible for us to love like that -- *unless* Christ lives and loves in him. With Christ's love within our, we can will to love as God directs us, regardless of our feelings.

When we find our self confronted with someone we don't *feel* loving towards, we can confess our lack of love, resist our human feelings, yield our self to Christ, and ask that He make us able to love.

Agape-love makes it possible to experience unfailing love in marriage. No marriage need ever die for lack of love. If love appears to have cooled, the answer is confession, repentance, and a willingness to stand on God's principle. The problem may be rough, but God's provision is secured by Christ.

Jesus commanded us to love - even our enemies. He would not have done so if

the provision was not already available.

These nine principles are linked together progressively, and we need them to possess the Promise-Land.

Peter concludes his thoughts with the following encouragements and promises . .

"For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:8-11

When we possess the Promise-Land, we will be fruitful and useful to the Lord, and will live a strong, good life.

Christ desires for us to strive for these "nine additions" to our faith in Christ. If we do not "possess their Promise-Land," we are short-sighted -- wandering in the wilderness.

God's intention is to bring all of us into the Promise-Land - and any believer who does not accept this opportunity is foolish!

Peter says, "*So, dear brothers, work hard to prove that you are really among those God has called and chosen, and then you will never stumble or fall away!"* 2 Peter 1:10

The word here for "never" has the meaning, "positively, absolutely, guaranteed never!"

Peter knew what it meant to fall; he had learned what it takes to keep from falling.

When we allow Christ to develop these nine principles in our life, we will never, ever fall!

Temptations will come! However, if there is nothing in our heart that will cause us to stumble, the temptation is only to sift us and prepare us to possess the Promise-Land.

"And God will open wide the gates of heaven for you to enter into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

2 Peter 1:11

Our Own Personal Battle

Like the children of Israel, when we enter into the Promised Land, we will find ourselves face to face with formidable adversaries. They have no intention of relinquishing their possessions without a bitter struggle. God has promised to drive our enemies out before us, little by little, but our participation and personal conduct in the battle will determine the outcome.

Our example is God's dealings with the Israelites. The story of how they came to possess their Biblical Promised Land, little by little, demonstrates the same principle over and over again: (1) When they obeyed God and trusted Him completely, He always won the battle for them, (2) when they relied on their own strength, they lost. Joshua and Jehoshaphat were two leaders who led their armies to victory by obeying and trusting God.

The story of the Battle of Jericho is told in Joshua, chapter 6. God told Joshua to commandeer his forces and march around the fortified city seven times - once a day for seven days. On the eighth day they were to march around the city seven times and in the seventh time around the priests were to blow their trumpets and the people were to give a loud shout - and the walls would come tumbling down. That is exactly what happened! Archeologists have dug at the site of old Jericho and found the remains of an old city wall that apparently fell "*down into the ground*" by some powerful force. What happened at Jericho is verifiable fact, not an old myth or fairy tale.

Later, Jehoshaphat and his men faced the multitudes of the armies of Moad, Ammon, and Mount Seit. But God told them, "*Don't be afraid! Don't be paralyzed by this mighty army! For the battle isn't yours, but God's!*" (2 Chronicles 20:25)

God instructed Jehoshaphat to place his choir band of singers and musicians in full view of the enemy forces, and while they sang praises to Jehovah, God turned the enemy armies against each other until they had completely destroyed each other. The children of Israel didn't receive a scratch.

The battle was God's, but the outcome depended on the conduct of the children of Israel during the fighting. Had they doubted God's words of instruction and involved themselves in the fighting, God could not have kept them from harm. ***God can only fight our battles if we follow His instructions and trust Him for the outcome.***

Our preparation for the battles God has promised to win for us consists of learning to get our own selves out of the way so that we can rely totally on God.

As we look back over the wilderness, over the problems and the temptations, we recognize that it is all part of the preparation for the battles to possess our Promise Land.

When a young person is recruited for the military service, he first must go to a boot camp – no doubt anxious, not knowing what is expected of him. He gets his verbal and written instructions first. Then comes the exercises to develop his physical endurance, his ability to handle weapons, and to conduct himself under simulated battle conditions. By the time he is through with training, he's eager to see some action and test in practice the principles he has been taught.

The young Christian is a recruit in the army of the Lord. The terminology of warfare is much used throughout the Bible to emphasize the very real battle between the forces of good and evil in our world. The Christian life is to be on the front lines, although the battle isn't ours – but God's!

Our preparations for battle start with the verbal and written instructions from God's Word. We need to know what is expected of us, and how God works. Then the rough part of the training comes when we move into problems and temptations to develop our endurance and test what we have learned.

God continues to offer opportunities for growth. He feeds us and strengthens us daily with His Word. Whenever we are presented with fresh teaching and messages, we should be on the alert to drink them in and make them a part of our equipment for we may be certain that we are going to need them as we move forward to battle. When we understand the principle and know what is expected for us, we can move with eager anticipation into the subsequent phases of our training.

The Apostle James experienced the joy of being prepared for battle in his day. He shares this word with us:

"Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations"
(James 1:2 – Amplified).

"...for when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow and don't try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, full and complete"
(Verses 3 & 4 – Living Bible)

We are ready for battle when we have gone through problems and temptations that have stripped us of our self-dependency and taught to depend solely on God for strength.

Another of the apostles of the Early Church, Paul, left us some challenging words on battle preparation:

"... I want to remind you that your strength must come from the Lord's mighty power within you. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand safe against all strategies and tricks of Satan. For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies--the evil rulers of the unseen world,

"those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world" (Ephesians 6:10-12 - Living Bible).

Today the world is witnessing increasing evidence of how real the powers of darkness are, and what formidable enemies they can be. Those who have fought the desperate battle against drug addiction, alcoholism, or homosexuality, to mention only three areas where the powers of darkness are at work, have discovered that it is impossible to be victorious in their own strength. If the battles are to be won at all -- they must be won by God!

The forces of darkness are actively at work in rebellion, crime, marriage breakups, sickness, and many other ills from which we suffer. But here, as in temptation, *the outcome hangs in the delicate balance between the individual, God, and the forces of evil.* Jesus Christ has already won the battle for us. Satan is defeated! But in each situation, the outcome depends on personal response. If one chooses to resist evil and yield totally to God, Christ will fight and win the battles for us.

Paul has some further advice for us with some specifics for getting ready to meet the enemy.

"So use every piece of God's armor – [Don't use any of your own] – to resist the enemy whenever he attacks, and when it is all over, you will still be standing up.- [The Greek word used here for "standing" is a military term, meaning "to stand as a conqueror"] – But to do this, you will need the strong belt of truth and the breastplate of God's approval. Wear shoes that are able to speed you on as you preach the Good News of peace with God. In every battle you will need faith as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan. And you will need the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit--which is the Word of God" (Ephesians 6:13-17 - Living Bible).

Everything we need to stand in the battle is provided for us. We don't have to be clever or strong or super-spiritual. We only need to rely on Jesus Christ. We are to be happy when we find our self moving into a battle, because the outcome will reveal one of two things: If we stand, it shows that we have absorbed what we need of the Christ-life to receive our provision of victory; if we fall we can be happy, as well – because the battle has revealed what is really in our heart and what we need for facing the next battle! It is a great deal better to discover any weaknesses so that they may be adjusted, rather than to have it revealed in eternity! If there is anger, resentment, or pride in our heart, and this is keeping us from claiming our rightful possession of the Promise Land – wouldn't it be better to find out about it now?

God allowed Joshua to lose a battle in order to show him that there was a hidden sin in his camp. Once that sin was exposed and removed, God led Joshua into battle with the same enemy and gave him victory. The story is recorded in Joshua, chapters 7

and 8.

After the battle at Jericho, God gave the children of Israel specific instructions not to keep any battle loot for themselves. One of Joshua's men, Achan, couldn't resist a beautiful robe, stole it, and hid it in the ground under his tent.

Later Joshua sent some of his men, to spy on the city of Ai -- the second city after Jericho in their route to capture their Promise Land. They returned with the report that it was a small city and wouldn't take more than two or three thousand of them to destroy it. In fact, he said, "*There's no point in all of us going there*" (Joshua 7:4).

The children of Israel, confident after their easy victory at Jericho, marched up against Ai, "...*and they were soundly, defeated...The Israeli army was paralyzed with fear at this turn of events. Joshua and the elders tore their clothing and lay prostrate before the Ark of the Lord until evening, with dust on their heads*" (Joshua 7:4-6).

Joshua had gone into battle unaware of the hidden sin in his camp. But he had also made a mistake himself. He had neglected to consult God before going up against this new enemy. If we would turn to God before a battle and pray, "*Lord, let there not be any hidden sin in me that will cause You to have to lead me into temptation – reveal that hidden sin now,*" then God is able to show us any trouble point without putting us through a losing battle.

Realizing immediately that God had permitted the defeat in order to show him something, Joshua turned in repentance and God told him about Achan's sin. The culprit was brought into the open and he and his entire family destroyed. Then God said to Joshua:

"...Don't be afraid or discouraged take the entire army and go to Ai, for it is now yours to conquer. I have given the king of Ai and all his people to you. You shall do to them as you did to Jericho and her king, but this time you may keep the loot and the cattle for yourselves"

(Joshua 8:1-2).

Why had God made the ruling against taking loot at Jericho when He allowed it at Ai? The answer to that question seems to be because He knew the weakness, spirit of disobedience, and greed in Achan. He permitted the temptation to bring the weakness out into the open. Once the weakness was exposed and repented of, God told Joshua not to be discouraged or afraid.

When we suffer defeat in battle, we should realize that God permits it to show us a weakness that He wants to replace with His strength. We should not be discouraged or afraid, because God never reveals our weakness in order to condemn us. He simply gives us opportunity to rid ourselves of our old nature so that we may replace it with the divine nature He has promised us.

Therefore, we can rejoice in our defeats and failures, knowing that the ultimate

end God desires for us is good. We often can learn as much (if not more) from a failure as from a success.

Defeats serve as a reminder – (as it did in the case of Joshua and his men) – that all is not well in the camp. We may roll along fairly smoothly, oblivious to our own tendencies to self-willed rebellion, until we stumble and fall in a battle. We should thank God right then and there for reminding us that we need Him. A defeat or failure is designed to bring us back to God. If we are not certain what caused the trouble, we must say as David did:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test my thoughts. Point out anything You find in me that makes You said, and lead me along the path of everlasting life" (Psalm 139:23-24).

First, we must return to God; second, we must confess that we are at fault. Even when we do not know our specific mistake, we must, like Joshua, repent. For we know that if we had followed given instructions and relied totally on the life and strength of Christ, victory would have been assured. Christ cannot fail. When we fail, it is because of our wrongdoing at some point.

Repentance leads to renewal. Hear David as he prayed following his discovery of wrongdoing:

"I admit my shameful deed--it haunts me day and night... You saw it all, and your sentence against me is just... Sprinkle me with the cleansing blood and I shall be clean again. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. And after you have punished me – [after my defeat] – give me back my joy again... Create in me a new, clean heart, O God, filled with clean thoughts and right desires"

(Psalms 51:3-10, Living Bible).

A clean heart and a new nature is part of the Promise Land. Little by little God exposes and renews our hearts. We couldn't take a complete overhaul at once. One by one, the compartments where there is selfishness – fear – greed – lust – idolatry – jealousy and other trouble spots, will be brought out into the open, cleansed, and renewed. This gives place to the new nature – love – joy – peace – kindness – patience – goodness – faithfulness – and self-control!

We need to look at our failures as opportunities for growth, bringing us closer to God. We need to pick our self up and say, "*Sorry I missed it again, Lord. Show me – teach me – change me.*" As we learn to trust ourselves less -- and Christ more, and as we learn to come to Him before the battle starts, we can be assured of increasing victories.

God will give us wisdom if we ask for it. He wants us to go into battle fully prepared as to how to conduct ourselves . . .

"If you want to know what God wants you to do, ask him, and he will gladly tell you, for he is always ready to give a bountiful supply of

wisdom to all who ask him; he will not resent it. But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to tell you, for a doubtful mind will be as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind; and every decision you then make will be uncertain, as you turn first this way and then that. If you don't ask with faith, don't expect the Lord to give you any solid answer"

(James 1:5-7 – Living Bible).

What could be more specific than these words? When we have learned how to turn the promise of wisdom into provision, we can come to God and say, "*Lord, I see I am getting into a battle. I don't want to squirm out of it. I want to go through it in Your strength and I want You to tell me how to conduct myself while I am in the problem.*" God will give us wisdom when we ask for it. That is a provision.

But, we must apply the principle of faith through the problem. We must *believe* that God can and will supply the wisdom. The problem will present us with the temptation to doubt and waver, and the outcome will be decided by us. We must resist the doubting and wavering and yield ourselves to Him who can supply the faith to take us through to provision and victory.

After victory in the battle we will reign as kings in life.

"Happy is the man who doesn't give in and do wrong when he is tempted, for afterwards he will get as his reward the crown of life that God has promised those who love Him" (James 1:12 – Living Bible).

The provision is ours – the Promised Land with cities we didn't build – wells we didn't dig – and orchards we didn't plant. There we are to experience financial security – marital joy – resting in God care. This is the place of rest where we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. There will be enemies and problems, but we are reigning over them in the peace and strength Christ affords.

In the midst of a trial, or temptation, we can say with James, "*Consider it wholly joyful... whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations*" (James 1:2 – Amplified Bible).

Nothing can keep Christ's love from us. When we have trouble or calamity, when some seeming irresistible temptation comes our way – *nothing* will ever be able to separate us from the love of God demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ when He died for us (Romans 8:35-39). This is *provision* – and it is ours to claim.

As Christians – God's "spiritual children of Israel" today – we are not meant to be permanent wilderness-wanderers. God wants us to lay claim to the provision provided for us in our Promised Land. He wants us to recognize *why* He led us into the wilderness and *where* He wants to take us.

- Have we learned to identify the promise, the principle, and the problem?
- Have we come to see the purpose of temptation and the religious question?
- Do we understand that if we fail once or twice – or even three times – in the problem, we know we can pick ourselves up and take another lap around the mountain without feeling guilty about it?
- Do we know what to turn for instructions when we are in doubt about the reason for our failure?
- Have we come to realize that when we do stand and enter the Promised Land, that there will be battles yet before us?
- Can we meet with wilderness experiences, with their problems, temptations, and religious questions, with the assurance that these are not given to keep us from our provision – but to prepare us to receive them?

As we answer these questions, I pray that this study will help us to count it joy when trials and temptations come – because we understand that God's purpose in temptations is to move us into our Promised Land where His provisions are rightfully ours.

**May we never resign our self to a life of permanent defeat
but be strong in battle for claiming His promises!**