

Lesson 7

THROUGH THE DESERT



The people of Israel, after crossing the desert, continued their journey with great expectation. Their dream was the promised land of Canaan. The Lord was guiding them and protecting them every step of the way. “The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people” (Ex. 13:21-22).

The Water of Marah

After crossing the sea even though they walked for three days through the Shur desert they couldn't find water anywhere. At last they found water at a place called Marah but it was too bitter to drink. People began to murmur against Moses.

He called upon the Lord asking: “What shall we drink”? He cried out to the LORD; and the LORD showed him a piece of Wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet” (Ex 15:24,25).

Manna and Quails

The people of Israel reached the desert of Sin. In the unbearable heat they were exhausted by hunger and thirst. They forgot God and murmured against Moses and Aaron. “The Israelites said to them, If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Ex 16:3).

God saw the hardships of the Israelites. He gave them plenty to eat, in the morning and evening. In the morning they got something like frosty wafers. All were surprised to see this strange thing on the ground and asked one another 'man ha, man ha' meaning in their language, 'what is it?' **That is how the bread from heaven came to be called manna.** They collected plenty of it and ate their fill.

“It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey” (Ex 16:31). **It was their food for forty years, till they reached the land of Canaan.** In the evenings they could catch plenty of quails and they enjoyed their tasty meat.

Once, during their long journey, the Israelites suffered from lack of water to drink. God asked Moses to strike the rock of Horeb with his staff. When he did so a spring sprouted forth from the rock and the people could drink as much as they wanted. Thus God looked after the people of Israel by giving them plenty to eat and drink. This made them happy.

The Covenant of Sinai

When the people of Israel, walking through the desert, reached the base of Mount Sinai and camped there, God called Moses from the Mountain and said: You go and tell the people of Israel: 'If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples'.

Moses called the elders of the people and explained to them all that the lord had told him. The people said in one voice: **“Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do”**. (Ex. 19:8). Then God established the covenant with them and as a symbol of the covenant He gave them the commandments.

The Serpent of the Desert

The people of Israel continued their journey through the desert, During this journey they again became impatient and spoke against God and Moses saying: “Why have you brought us out Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food” (Numbers 21: 5). They had clearly forgotten the numerous blessings that God had showered upon them. So God decided to punish them. He sent poisonous serpents among them. Many Israelites died of snakebite.

Realizing their fault the people approached Moses and said: “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us”. So Moses prayed for the people and the Lord said to Moses: “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live”. **“So Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live”** (Num. 21 7-9).

The Tent of Meeting

God continued His plan of salvation through the people of Israel. During the journey in the wilderness Moses used to pitch his tent outside far off from the camp. Moses called it the **tent of meeting God** and Moses used to talk in this tent. We find a beautiful description of this in the book of Exodus (Ex. 33:7-11).

Whenever Moses went to the tent the people used to stand in front of their respective tents and watch till he entered the tent. “**When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses**”. When the people saw the pillar of cloud at the tent they would prostrate themselves, in front of their own tents. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as one speaks to a friend. After this Moses would return to the camp (Ex 33:8-11).

The Lord with the People

Moses who was ordained to lead Israel wished to know the ways of God. Once Moses spoke to the Lord saying: “**Now, if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight**” (Ex. 33:13).

The Lord replied to Moses; “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Ex. 33:14). Thus the Lord fulfilled Moses' wish. A cloud appeared above the tent erected by Moses. It stayed over the tent in the form of a cloud by day and in the form of fire by night. **They considered this as the presence of the Lord. When the cloud lifted from above the tent they started on their journey. Wherever the cloud stopped they would stop and pitch the tents of the camp.** They did so as commanded by the Lord.

God's Guidance

In the Old Testament we find several persons who were guided by God in a special way. Such as the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses the leader of the people of Israel was also guided by God all along his way. As a people it was Israel that had the privilege of being directly guided by God. God set a goal to His own people whom He had brought out of Egypt. The goal was the distant land of Canaan, often mentioned as the Promised Land. The journey to this land was not an easy one. It was tiresome and full of hurdles. But as long as it was the Lord who gives guidance there was nothing to fear. As long as the journey was in the company of the Lord people had nothing to worry about. This is the lesson that we learn from the long and torturous journey of the Israelites through the wilderness.

The Pilgrim Church

The people of Israel, who got liberated from Egypt, were a pilgrim community that travelled through the wilderness, with the land of Canaan as their goal. Similarly, the people of the New Testament, the Church, is also a pilgrim community. God has called the members of the Church for a journey through this world, having first liberated them from the bonds of sin. Even as Moses led the Israelites those days, the Church leads the believers today. The goal of the Church is to lead the faithful, the pilgrim people to the Kingdom of Heaven. The journey through this world, with heaven as goal, is not so simple or easy to make. There would arise several problems and hurdles. On all such occasions God will be there to help, for, He is faithful in his promises and merciful in His deeds.

God who was with the Israelites as a cloud over the tent, is today with us intervening and helping in our life-situations. He sees us, knows our deeds, and leads and directs us. All we have to do is to recognize His voice and walk through the ways that He shows us. Then we shall be able to reach our goal, the kingdom of Heaven.

The ways of God are different from our ways. Even in the midst of hardships He leads us to salvation. When we face dangers He will protect us, for He is faithful. The history of Moses gives us the message that the Lord, who called, strengthened and guided Moses, will strengthen and guide us also.

Let us Pray

O God who guided the Israelites through the wilderness, lead us also in our journey towards the heavenly home.

Read the word of God and narrate

Narrate the event of Moses and bronze serpent.
(Numbers 21:1-9).



Word of God for our Guidance

“My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:14).

My decision

Like the Israelites who followed the way shown by God,
I will also follow the way shown by God.

Let us do

Write the first two sentences from the song of Moses
(Exodus 15:1-2)

Let us find out the answer

1. How did God guide the Israelites day and night after they left the land of Egypt?
2. What was the food God gave the Israelites in the desert?
3. What is the meaning of the word Manna?
4. What is the speciality of the ark of the Covenant?
5. What is the message that the journey of the Israelites through the desert gives us?