

The Exodus Journey

There is a fundamental dynamic that takes place in the human experience which touches all of our lives. If we look carefully, we can see it in the testimony of history at various times and places. It involves the basic human journey, which generally begins in oppression, and takes us through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. Oppression, Wilderness, and Promised Land are three realities that most human beings experience.

OPPRESSION is a state of existence where the boundaries are fixed and basic human needs are provided. This includes food, clothing, shelter, work, and even the meaning of life. If the system of oppression is benevolent and generous, life might not seem too bad. If it is harsh and cruel, life will be a living hell. In either case, the result is similar and some of the results are generally the same. Oppression leads to radical dependence and a distorted view of the future. The human being becomes a victim of the situation because of the radical dependence and is often unable to make decisions or take responsibility for life.

THE WILDERNESS is another story. There, one might be confronted with a situation where there are no boundaries and no provisions. The victim has now turned into the wanderer and now faces a life of not being cared for. There is no food, no bed, no direction, and no hope. Alice in Wonderland asked when she came to a fork in the road: "which road should I take?" The guide said: "Where are you going?" She replied: "I don't know." He said: "Then It doesn't make any difference which road you take if you don't know where you are going?" In the WILDERNESS we are simply lost, wandering people, living with no goal or direction toward the future.

Israel learned that life was much different once she left Egypt. Pharaoh had provided food, shelter, work, and even meaning in life, such as it was. In the wilderness she discovered none of these and many wanted to return to Egypt. Some asked Moses: "where is the bread, and where are

the graves to bury our dead? Pharaoh at least gave us bread and graves." [Ex. 14:11] It is interesting that from the perspective of the wilderness, the old state of oppression doesn't look so bad. Like the Prodigal Son, we have a deep yearning to return home to a situation that was intolerable to us when we were there.

THE PROMISED LAND is what makes the difference. If it doesn't exist in our lives we are in serious trouble because it represents our dreams and hopes for the future. Its promise is what brought Moses to life and moved him to create a whole new vision. It was what kept him filled with hope while lost in the wilderness. It was what led to his fundamental conviction that neither Egypt or wilderness were his home or final resting place.

The problem with the Promised Land is that when you are in Egypt it's hard to believe that it exists. Egypt is a place of death, and dead people are seldom filled with hope.

For the person in prison, the prison represents the Egypt experience. There, radical dependency develops. There, the need to make decisions diminishes, and it is there that the vision of the future becomes distorted until it centers only on a parole date and the street. In fact, the street becomes mistaken for the Promised Land. This is the result of a distorted view of hope, and like Israel in the Wilderness, often the person who leaves prison finds the struggle of the street so painful and hopeless, that the meaning and reality of prison life doesn't seem quite so bad.

For those who embrace The Exodus Program, the Promised Land is The Exodus Contract. It involves concrete goals in seven areas:

1. Family Ties
2. Education
3. Physical Fitness and Health
4. Community Involvement
5. Spiritual Growth
6. Vocation, Work and Money Management
7. Three future events that will improve the quality of my life

The goals of the Exodus Contract are intended to create an intentional human being who knows that the struggle is painful and deep, and that it holds death and life. It is the Exodus view that out of this struggle we will create a new world that is both human and life-giving. The past becomes approved (it is our wisdom), the present is received, (it is where we find possibility), and our future is open because we are no longer victims nor wanderers. We are now people of hope in an arena which seldom gives birth to hope. That is what Exodus is all about.