

THE NATION WITH A CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH
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Hebrought them forth also with silver and gold; and there was not one feeble among their tribes (Ps. 105:37).

When the government of the United States authorized the effort to deliver Kuwait from the dominance of the aggressor, lavish support was supplied to the American liberators. Millions of gallons of bottled drinking water were sent to alleviate the thirst of the army. Fully equipped hospital ships were ready to receive sick and wounded men. and in a multitude of ways the War Department arranged for every emergency. If the entire population of a great city had, for any reason, to migrate to a new location, similar preparations would be made. Every detail relating to health, comfort, and safety would be considered, and the mass migration would command the attention of the world's media.

It is strange to discover that when two million Hebrews began their journey from Egypt to Canaan, none of these preparations were made. There were no ambulances to carry infirm people. no preparation regarding food nor drink: the people had no weapons to withstand attacks. There were no sick people, and only babies needed attention. It was the only time in history when an entire nation had a clean bill of health. "There was not a feeble person among their tribes" (Ps. 105:37). The Berkeley Version of the Scriptures translates the text: "There was not an invalid among their tribes." Spurgeon, the great British preacher, wrote: "And there was not one feeble person among the tribes—A great marvel indeed. The number of their army was very great and yet there was not one in hospital, not one carried in an ambulance, nor limping in the rear. Poverty and oppression had not enfeebled them. Jehovah Raphi had healed them. They carried none of the diseases of Egypt, and felt none of the exhaustion which sore bondage produces. When God calls His people to a long journey, He fits them for it. In the pilgrimage of life, our strength shall be equal to our days. See the contrast between Egypt and Israel—in Egypt one dead in every house, and among the Israelites, not one, so much as limping."

A Continuing Satisfaction... No Joy is Complete Without God

Happiness is the music of the soul. The psalmist wrote: "And he brought forth his people with joy. and his chosen with gladness" (Ps. 105:43). "When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion. we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter. and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us: whereof we are glad" (Ps. 126:1-3). When the beggar who sat at the temple gate was healed by Peter and John, it was said: "And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping. and praising God" (Acts 3:8). David was exultant when he said: "I waited patiently for the LORD: and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit. out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God. Many shall see it. and fear, and shall trust in the LORD" (Ps. 40:1-3).

True happiness depends upon fellowship with God. When Israel forsook the Lord, rejected His messengers, and became the slaves of the Babylonians. songs were not heard in their camps. The psalmist said: "By the rivers of Babylon. there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs

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of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?" (Ps. 137:1-4). It is difficult to produce inspired music when the Divine Composer is excluded from the human heart.

A Constant Supply ... No Provision Is Sufficient Without God
And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste: for they said, We be all dead men. And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry; neither had they prepared for themselves any victual (Exod. 12:33-39).

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When the children of Israel made a hurried departure from Egypt. they had little time to prepare for their journey. Such animals as they possessed were quickly rounded up. and the mass migration commenced. Probably most of the cattle belonged to the mixed multitude that decided to accompany the Hebrews. These herds provided food for the travelers during the initial stages of their long journey. Unfortunately, those supplies soon diminished, for the large company consumed a great amount of food. It was impossible for more than two million people to live off the land, and unless God had rained manna from heaven, the people would have died in the wilderness.

The fact that God is able to provide what His people need is a lesson which all nations should learn. Misers may amass a great fortune but finally discover wealth can only pay for a funeral. Athletes may become immensely popular, but age undermines their skill, and younger people claim their fame. Kings, queens, and other rulers of nations may appear to be irreplaceable, but death terminates their activities. Immortality is unobtainable unless God holds out His hand. Sometimes the Lord performs miracles to accomplish His purposes, but at other times He uses different methods to assist His children. He sent manna to feed the children of Israel, but He also supplied quails (Exod. 16:13). Werner Keller says: "The Exodus of the Israelites began in the spring; the time of the great bird migrations. From Africa, which in summer becomes unbearably hot and dry, the birds have, from time immemorial, migrated to Europe along two routes. One goes via the west coast of Africa to Spain; the other via the eastern Mediterranean to the Balkans. In the early months of the year, quails together with other birds, fly across the Red Sea, which they must cross on the eastern route. Exhausted by their long flight, they alight on its flat shores to gather fresh strength for the next stage of their journey over the high mountains to the Mediterranean. Even today the Bedouins of this area catch the exhausted birds in spring and autumn by hand."

A Ceaseless Safety... No Strength Is Enough Without God
And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way: and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people (Exod. 13:21-22).

The Bible says there were "about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children" (Exod. 12:37). Apparently the people only possessed homemade spears and lances: they had no chariots of iron, for these would have been confiscated by Pharaoh. Probably many of the men were blacksmiths who were skilled in working with iron. Within a short period of time some of Israel's males would have been able to defend against

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aggression, and ultimately Israel possessed a great army. A pillar of cloud led them by day. and a pillar of fire by night. They never marched too far from wells and oases, and occasionally it was necessary to travel at night to escape the relentless heat of the day. Few enemies existed in the uninhabited wilderness, but as history reveals, the greatest danger came from within the camp.

When people begin to criticize God, even empires can disintegrate. If the Lord is excluded from the counsel of men, even the strongest weapons of war may become useless. If God withdraws support, human effort becomes inadequate. The prophet, Zechariah, expressed this fact when he wrote: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD" (Zech. 4:6).

A Complete Security Future Is Safe Without God

This book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage: be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Josh. 1:8-9).

It was over; the wilderness ordeal had terminated. Innumerable graves were all through the wilderness, for two million people had died, and a complete generation, with the exception of two men, had perished. Moses had climbed the mountain of God but had not returned. Somewhere in the solitude God had gently laid His servant to rest. Joshua had become the new leader of Israel, but the future was ominous as, once again, the nation stood at the crossroads of destiny. Forty years earlier the Hebrews had refused to enter Canaan, and had consequently wandered aimlessly through the wilderness. Now they were to enter

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the land where enemies were giants. The entire responsibility of leadership rested upon the shoulders of Joshua. Perhaps he was apprehensive: his task was frightening. How could he with an army of untrained men overcome the Canaanites who made the Hebrews feel like grasshoppers (see Num. 13:33)? Three simple facts explain his success.

An Unfailing God... The Command to Serve

God's promise was reassuring. "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Josh. 1:5). The new leader had enjoyed fellowship with the departed Moses. He was now assured the faithfulness of God would remain unchanged.

The Unwavering Guide... A Challenge to Succeed

Throughout the journey in the wilderness the guidance of God had been unmistakable. By day and night the pillars of the cloud and fire had led the nomads. Now Joshua was assured God's presence would remain. The Lord had said: "But the land whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven" (Deut. 11:11). Life has always been filled with high and low experiences, but God promised to give rain in both areas. Obedient people could not wander beyond the reach of His care.

An Unseen General... A Companion to Share

It must have been a thrilling experience to follow the cloud by day and the fire by night, but that joy was to be surpassed.

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And it came to pass. when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship. and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua. Loose thy shoe from off thy foot: for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so (Josh. 5:13-15).

The clouds above the tabernacle were symbols of the divine presence; the captain of the host was the Lord himself. Unseen, but always present. He guaranteed that Joshua would never be alone. The leader of Israel would have appreciated the words of Daniel W. Whittle (1840-1903):

Never a trial that He is not there,
Never a burden that He doth not bear,
Never a sorrow that He doth not share,
Moment by moment, I'm under His care.

Moment by moment I'm kept in His love:
Moment by moment I've life from above:
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine;
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am thine.

1. Charles Spurgeon, Great Verses from the Psalms (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977). 204-5.
2. Werner Keller. The Bible as History (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1956), 120.

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