

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

APRIL 9, 2018

Before we jump right in, I want to say thank you to my friends of the show, and especially our newest ones: Mary K and Carmen. I appreciate you all very much.

I am going to put some Old Testament in your pocket today. We're going to love and lift all we've been given. I am going to try to apply, of all things, the Old Testament to our daily lives. I know that just hearing that we're going to study the Old Testament probably makes your heart pound or maybe you just rolled your eyes, but I promise you before you are done with this series with me, you are going to love it. I actually love the Old Testament more than the New Testament and the Gospels. That's probably blasphemous to even say in some circles, because obviously the New Testament is about Christ. It's not that I don't appreciate the New Testament. I absolutely do. But you appreciate the New Testament so much more when you understand the Old Testament. That's why Jesus said that a good steward takes from the both the old and the new.

In this series, my prayer is that you are going to be a steward by the time we are finished that can go to the Old Testament and pull out what you need to appreciate and to study and to meditate more deeply on the New Testament. I hope, if you are able, that you have your Bible with you. I hope that if you are able to do so that you would always have your Bible with you when you are studying with me, because there is something almost sacramental about turning the pages and feeling their oniony thinness. I love it. I especially love being at a conference and asking people to turn to so-and-so chapter and verse and hearing all of the pages. I love it.

I move very quickly with verses and I do that partly because I'm trying to give you some practice in finding the chapters and books of the Bible. The other part is I just can't wait on you because I don't have the time in this format. I hope that you will practice it. One of the things that we used to do at camp and Vacation Bible School and stuff like that is practice what they would call Bible drills. We did this when I was very young - 6, 7, 8 years old - all the way through high school. It was fun. It was a competition. You would take your Bible and the leader would stand in the front of the class and read off a particular book, chapter, and verse, and you had to be the first to find it. If you were, then you said what the verse was and you won some sort of small prize or maybe you got a point or whatever, and the group at the end who won got a prize. So, I know my books of the Bible really well because of that. You should practice. I call that using your bionic fingers. When you're following me we're looking for books and chapters and verses, I say get your bionic fingers because we are going to move really quickly. That is part of what helps you become familiar with the layout of the Bible.

Now, I am the first to warn people when they begin to read and study the Bible - because I hear this all the time, "Where should I start?" I caution people about starting at the very beginning of the Bible. It's not like any other book. That's part of why it's so difficult to understand. It's part of why it's difficult to navigate. So many things about it can be very, very confusing. That's part of why I wanted to do this series with you, because I have experienced that becoming familiar with the larger map of the forest of the Bible makes you much more familiar with the trees of the Bible, if I can mix metaphors like that. I hope you'll stick with me. I think you're really going to like this series.

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The first thing I would like you to do is turn to your table of contents. It's important to know several overarching things about the Old Testament. The first is it is not arranged or written as a narrative. A narrative tells a story. It begins that way, and that is part of why it can be very confusing to read and study it. You start out reading about creation. It starts at the very beginning. "In the beginning..." In fact, the first book of the Bible is called Genesis, which means origin or beginning. The first five books of the Bible are called by the Jews the Pentateuch, or the Torah. It means The Five Tools. Penta means tools. Torah is the word for the law. That's because the first five books of the Old Testament are the Jewish law. It wasn't given to Moses verbatim in book form, or anything like that, but the law was what God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai. I'm kind of getting ahead of myself. But, the first five books are called the Torah, or the Pentateuch. That means Five Tools. That is very important to know.

The first two books read like a narrative. You will learn all kinds of stuff about the beginning of the world and the beginning of civilization and the beginning of God's relationship to humanity in those first two books. Then, we hit a wall with Leviticus. If you've ever tried to read the Bible from the very beginning and you hit Leviticus, I guarantee it was either confusing or disorienting. If you're like me, it made me angry. I remember reading parts of it as a female, and things that were in the law - for instance, a woman, during her monthly time, was unclean according to Jewish law. First of all, what's that even doing in the Bible? Second of all, what does that mean? It's hardly my fault, so why should I be unclean when God made me like this? The other part is it's just full of all of these oppressive rules and regulations. It is probably, except for Lamentations, the most depressing book in the whole Bible, or at least it was for me. I remember reading it the first time and I got angry. A lot of the prohibitions and the rules were oppressive, and I grew up under a very strict rule giver and rule keeper, and so rules chafed me greatly. It seemed to me that my whole Christian life, then, was supposed to be about keeping these stupid little rules. It bugged me a lot. But, what you have to know about the book of Leviticus, Dear One, is that it is the worship manual of the people of God. It was a liturgical book. It was like the rubrics, which is worship rules of the Catholic Church. When the priest reads from that book up there, or even if you just have the Magnificat or something like that, you read those responsorial and in the Magnificat you can see in the center it gives you the readings and the responses of what the priest says, and what we are supposed to say, and all the back and forth. That is a liturgical manual. It's a very loose application. I am not talking about the absolute nuts and bolts and all that, but Leviticus is the liturgical manual of the Jewish people, of the Old Testament. When you read those rules and regulations you have to realize that is what they are there for. They are to teach the people this liturgy and to show them how to live in the closest possible proximity to God.

That's not to say that we have to keep those rules still, because they were Jewish. We are not Jewish, we are Christian. We do similar things. Our liturgical structure is built on the old liturgical structure, but it's not the same. We don't carry out the same rituals and ceremonies. We don't have the same sacrifices. We don't have even the same rules in so many ways. I'm getting ahead of myself, but I just want to be careful to point out as you pick up your Bible and you start to read that the first two books will read as a narrative but that third one, Leviticus, is the worship manual of the people and so it is full of rules. It is almost depressing. If you don't know that when you begin you're going to get angry or irritated or just fling it down and not ever pick it up again. Read it with that knowledge. Can you see, then, that knowing that is what it is before you begin reading it can head off that frustration before we get to it? That is why I am pointing it out.

You have Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus, and then you have Numbers and Deuteronomy. Numbers is sort of a repeat of the book of Exodus. It numbers the people, basically. Then, you have

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Deuteronomy. Deuter- means second, the second law. It is a review of sorts that Moses and God did with the people before they went into the Promised Land. That is why it is called the Second Law. It goes back over the Ten Commandments, and it goes over the story of the people to that point, and it tells them that they must choose life or death, that they are going into the Promised Land, and this is how we prepare and this is how God has led you to this point. It's a big review. I love Deuteronomy because God has used it over and over in my own life to remind me that before we head to a Promised Land of some sort in my life, he always does a review. I love that about God. He is so consistent. That is one of my favorite things about coming into the Catholic Church is to realize how shockingly consistent God is. When he says "I am God, I do not change", which is a verse out of Malachai, he means it. God doesn't just say stuff. When he says something, it is absolute truth. So, when he says he does not change, the New Testament is built on the Old Testament. Nothing has really changed as far as the underlying reality of what is happening. That is why it is important that we understand the Old Testament, because once we do everything in the New Testament starts to really come alive, especially our Catholic worship and practice. That was the biggest seller for me in the Catholic Church, was understanding the Old Testament. That's really why I am doing this.

Okay, so you've picked up your Bible and read through. You know that those first five books are the Pentateuch. Then we have Judges, Ruth, and Samuel, and those are what happened after they enter the Promised Land and they begin to take over that land and they are fighting for it. The people, then, come into the land and they get comfortable.

I didn't even say, and I should have, that the Bible is separated into the Old Testament and the New Testament. Testament means covenant. It's the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in Christ. That is the first division. Then you have the divisions in genre, which we will get to in a moment. The genres, then, are broken down into books of the Bible. The first five are the Pentateuch, then you have Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, and Joshua all recounting the Israelites escape from Egypt and that partial conquest of Palestine, the Palestinian land that is the Promised Land. Leviticus is their liturgical worship manual. Then, we have Judges through Esther and the Maccabees that all detail the system of judges that led to their kings and kingdoms. That whole set of books show their rule and their reign, and the tragic split and captivities of the people under the kings of the kingdoms, and they give us some history through the great empires up through the advent of Christ. Then, we have the wisdom literature of the people: Job through Sirach. It's sort of a moral science or philosophy that contains their collection of cultural songs and prayers and poetry and parables and proverbs.

Then, as the people multiplied and conquered the nations around the Promised Land to make it their own, they also adopted foreign political and religious ways. They were actually supposed to go in and wipe out the people but what happened was they sort of only halfway overtook the Promised Land, and so they settled in and among the people that were already there. They were constantly fighting against the people that were in those sites. We call them the -ites. The Jebusites and the Canaanites and the Jezerites and all that. You'll see that litany of -ites sometimes in the Old Testament, and those are the enemies of the people of God. They were already occupying that area. God had told them that that land was theirs, he was giving it to the people, and it was because they had a relationship with them. He was calling them into a relationship with him so that he could give them this land so that they could then bring the people, all of the people, into a relationship with him too. That was what was supposed to happen, but it didn't happen because they didn't do what God said to do by going in and taking over the land. They sort of adopted these political and religious ways of the

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people around them. They enthroned kings, for example. They were actually a theocracy. God was their king, but the people wanted to be like the surrounding nations and they wanted their own king, a real person in the flesh. It's kind of interesting that God would answer that prayer because they were a theocracy. He answered that prayer in Christ, but I'm getting way ahead of myself. He always intended for them to have a king, but he intended for it to be himself. He had always planned that the incarnation would bring them a king, but they got ahead of him. He answered that prayer with the kings, and he provided them temporary kings. The stories of the kings are in Samuel, Kings, and partly the Chronicles. If you read Samuel and Kings, what you'll find is that it's sort of a repeat. It tells the same story twice. You'll start reading and you read 1 and 2 Samuel, then you start the next book, which is 1 Kings and you think, "Hey, wait a minute. I've already read this." And you have, because it's a repeat. It's worth reading because you get more information the first time around. It's not really an elaboration, but you get different information in each of those sets of books.

They enthroned things, and as they did so, because they hadn't conquered all the land around them they fell into these idolatrous religious practices of the people around them, namely child sacrifice. That was a big one, but there was all kinds of idolatry. God sent rounds of prophets to speak in his name and to warn the people to cleave to him and everything that he had personally and uniquely revealed to them, because he did not want them to face the inherent consequences of giving themselves to things and to nations that did not love them. Through the prophets he was constantly sending them warnings that those nations and those things would turn on them and use them unmercifully, and that happened often. They were in bondage in slavery to the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, and later, although they weren't technically slaves they were still subjects of Rome. The rest of the Old Testament, then, is a testament of all of those prophets warnings. Through those warnings we also get a glimpse of the coming Messiah that they predicted. They did that to give the people hope. The prophet would always say "You've fallen into sin and God is going to judge you like this but once you've turned back to God he promises to do this and this and this for you." Those promises always involved the Messiah in some way, shape, or form.

The prophets are divided into the major prophets and the minor prophets; major just meaning the books are longer and minor meaning they are shorter. That covers all of the books of the Old Testament. You can separate them by genre.

The first five are the Pentateuch, then you have the kings and the conquering of the Promised Land, then you have the wisdom literature from Job through Song of Solomon. Maccabees are at the end of the Old Testament but it goes with the history books of Judges, Ruth, Samuel, and those. Then you have the prophets from Isaiah all the way to Malachi. You can see, then, that the Old Testament is separated by genre. You have the law, the history books, the wisdom literature, and the prophets. Technically, the Jews only separate it into three genres: law, prophets, and wisdom, but you also have that history in there too. In any case, you can see that the Old Testament is not going to read like a narrative. You're not going to pick it up and read it like a novel. If you try to do that, you are going to be very frustrated. If you have tried that, Dear One, and I hope you have, I don't want you to be frustrated but I want you to know that is why. Because it can be very, very confusing.

Another of the things that can be confusing about the Old Testament is the way that it is laid out in terms of a spiritual story. The first five books tell us the story of the Exodus and how God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt and led them through all that difficulty into the Promised Land and gave them all that he had promised them. He rescued them from literal bondage. The whole Old

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Testament can be summed up in that story, the story of the Exodus, and it often is. It is an account that remains a picture of our own Christian life. God rescued his people from slavery, he led them through the barren desert and scarcity to deeper knowledge of him, and then he led them onward to the richness of the Promised Land. He called it a land flowing with milk and honey. That was actually part of the promise he made to the fathers. He made them a nation, he gave them a law summed up in the Ten Commandments, he gave them a covenant relationship and a system of liturgical worship, we are going to look at in detail in the coming weeks, and all of that unified them under one god, their god. Remember that in Egypt they were polytheistic so they worshipped all kind of gods. Part of what they were learning out in that desert was how to worship properly. As a family, they observed a liturgical system of holidays and rituals that both memorialized and preserved their national identity, but it also prepared them for a savior who was going to actually deliver the whole world and draw all of it into God's embrace as a big family.

When we approach the Old Testament it is important to get a feel for the general What of the Bible. What's it about? The Old Testament is the story of the Old Testament people. I compare it to an onion metaphor. The Bible and all of salvation history contained in it, both old and new, is laid out like an onion. You peel it from the outside in. The Old Testament tells us that God is probing and correcting the literal, visible, outward behavior of these polytheistic infant spiritual people in the Old Testament. He is very strict and the punishments are quick and sure and even seem harsh at times. In fact, in just a cursory reading of those first five books, the Pentateuch, we see that God ordered the total annihilation of whole cities and nations and people groups and civilizations - men, women, children, property, and beasts, it says. In fact I remember reading a psalm one time that said something about crashing the babies' heads on the rocks and I was just thinking "My goodness!" It is kind of violent, honestly, and it seems very brutal. That can turn people off when they begin to read it, but you have to understand that what is happening in the Old Testament is God is teaching a polytheistic people how to worship monotheistically. He is teaching them how to worship the One God properly. It's not because he's jealous of his prerogatives, it's because he's trying to draw them into the closest possible relationship with him. In order to do that, we have to meet certain requirements because God himself is holy. It's important to understand when we are reading the Old Testament, when we get to those parts that seem so brutal and unloving and unkind and they seem at odds with what Jesus has been shown to us to be, it's not a different god altogether. Jesus is the face of God. We have to understand that it is what the church calls a progressive pedagogy. God is teaching us step by step, and he starts in the Old Testament with a polytheistic people who know nothing about God and nothing about worship. They are carnal, whiny, untrained, undisciplined, and they know nothing about how to behave with God. They don't know God at all. God is trying to teach them and he starts just how you start with very young children. You give them very strict and clear rules.

So, we are doing a survey of the Old Testament. People get very confused reading the Old Testament and I understand. The first time I took a survey in theology class I was stunned. I thought "Why has nobody taught us this??" And so I want to make sure that as you are studying and reading your Bibles that you don't come up against this frustration, because it can make you just stop reading it altogether. I hope you'll hang with me. Our hair is going to be on fire throughout this series.

We are looking at a very general picture of what the Old Testament is, and it is the old covenant. That is what testament means. It is one of the two that make up the Bible: The old covenant and the new covenant. The old means before Christ. All of the people of the Old Testament were looking forward to the promise of the Messiah. He would be the ultimate redeemer. All of the people in the New

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Testament are looking back toward when he came, the advent of Christ, all that happened when he was here, and the implications of that immediately after his ascension. It was not even a full 100 years. He only lived 33 years, we believe. The letters of the New Testament are the experiences of the disciples and letters to the churches. That is the new covenant under Christ. The Old Testament is the old covenant. I'm going to tell you and your mind is going to be blown when I tell you what a covenant is. We are going to do that next week. A covenant is, in Dr. Scott Hahn's terminology, an exchange of persons. I grew up learning that a covenant was a contract, like a legal contract. I was taught that because we are familiar with the word testament, like "The Last Will and Testament". That is indeed a contract. It stipulates goods and services, and it is the distribution of such. But that is not what the Old Testament is. It is not a legal contract. It is in a sense a legal contract because it does bind two parties together, but a legal contract is about goods and services, it's not about people and relationships. Covenants are an exchange of persons. That is why marriage is called a covenant in the Church, because it is an exchange of persons. I give myself to my husband, my husband gives himself to me. In a covenant we give ourselves to God and God gives himself to us.

God always initiates a covenant. In fact, covenants originate with him as far back as creation, and I cannot wait to show you then. The old covenant, then, is the story of God giving himself first to creation. When he created, he created in seven days and then he gave himself to creation in covenant. How do we know that? Because he did it in seven days, and the word seven is where covenant comes from. God "sevens" himself to creation. He covenanted himself to it. He gave himself to it. He gave himself to creation in covenant, and then the other half of the covenant was with Adam. Not only was it to creation but also to marriage. Marriage is one of the first covenants of the Bible. Adam gives himself to Eve and Eve gives herself to Adam, but also God covenants himself to marriage himself. I'll tell you that story later and we'll get to it in detail, I promise. That's the covenant with Adam. Then you have the covenant with Noah.

I'm not going to get into this is a lot of detail because I don't have time, but I will say that Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers and I cover this quite extensively in our book "Ignite", which is about Bible study and how to study the Bible. In that, we talk about covenants because the whole essence of the Bible really is covenant. We have the old and new covenants. We talk about covenants there because it's the whole Why of the Bible. It's the Why of the Old Testament and it's the Why of the New Testament, because it is an exchange of persons. The whole Bible is about God giving himself to us and our giving ourselves back to God in a covenant. That's what the whole story is about. Isn't that beautiful? It makes me almost cry. It's an exchange of persons. The covenant with Adam was God giving himself to creation and God giving himself to Adam and Eve and to marriage. That was the Adamic covenant.

The second was the covenant with Noah. Where Adam and Eve was a relationship, a man and a woman, and God gave himself to a man and woman, God gives himself to a family. God actually preserves the whole human race in Noah and his family. He first gives himself to creation, then he gives himself to a man and a woman, then he gives himself to a family. Then the third covenant he gives himself in covenant to Abraham. Abraham is the leader of a tribe. He is a tribal chief. God gives himself, then, to all of the tribe through Abraham. Notice that covenants are, in the Bible, an increasing self-donation of God first to a man and a woman, then to a family, then to a tribe, and then in the Mosaic covenant, to a nation, the nation of Israel. When God called them out of Egypt he made them a nation. He gave them a law and they became the nation of Israel. Man, do I wish I had time to tell you all of this -- it is so good -- but I don't. it's enough to say, though, that in these covenants the

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whole Old Testament is about these covenants, this increasing self-donation of God to his people. He gives himself to a nation and then later the nation multiplies and there are lots of people. Remember we talked about, in the genres, that then the people wanted kings. God then gives himself in covenant to David, and in so doing he gives himself to a kingdom. Increasingly God has given himself in covenant to a man and a woman, then to a family, then to a tribe, then to a nation, and now to a kingdom. All of these are prophetic of what God would do through the Messiah in the New Covenant. The Old Testament, the Old Covenant, is the synopsis, if you will. When you think of the Old Covenant, think of this self-donation of God. God revealed himself to humanity and he gave himself to humanity through a succession of covenants.

That is why he is inviting you to do, Dear One, is to give yourself increasingly to him in covenant. We do that, first of all, through the sacraments. We also do that through what we call in the church ongoing conversion. In my Baptist roots we called that backsliding and rededication. I don't really like that term because it seems like you have messed up big time and you're coming back and recommitting. That is what we are doing, but in an ongoing conversion it implies that you know you are going to mess up. It's not a surprise. We know we are going to mess up just like the children of Israel did. We know we are going to repent and we are going to get back up on our feet and continue on forward. Whereas backsliding and rededication always implied to me - though it may not to anyone else—like it was a surprise, like “Oops, I messed up, now I need to go rededicate.” I think it had that feel for me because a rededication was sort of a big deal, and if you did that it was usually because you had spent some time outside of the church doing stuff you knew you weren't supposed to be doing, and in rededication the whole church gathered around you and was celebrating that you had come back to Jesus. Sort of like the prodigal son. When the prodigal son came home, it was like a rededication. Whereas in the Catholic Church, we call that process ongoing conversion and we understand that we fall daily and we screw up all the time. If we're really going rededicate all the time, we'd be busy rededicating and having that ceremony all the time. Instead, we follow the pattern of the Old Testament. That was my point with that whole rededication thing.

The old covenant, then, is the constant increasing self-donation of God. He is revealing himself more fully each time with each self-donation unto the promised Messiah of the new covenant. When we read the scriptures we have to sort of know that going in. Another really cool thing that helps when we are reading the Old Testament is to understand the overarching principle of the whole Old Testament is the story of the Israelite people. Remember that God is teaching them like they are children, because they are. He is very strict. The punishments are quick and sure and they even seem harsh. He's leading them to the desert and he kicks out all their props from under them. He is teaching them to depend on him there for provision, for real literal provision. Literal water and food, physical protection from human enemies, civil laws, national rulers, religious leadership, all of this is real and literal in the Old Testament. He is doing this because he is training them for the time when they will be able to think more deeply and more spiritually. We can't do that yet, right? If God goes to them and says “You have to be totally holy” and they are still thinking about being in Egypt where they worshipped the Nile and the flies and the frogs and the cats and the Pharaoh, they have no clue what it means to be holy. Instead, God has to teach them through all of these rules of the Old Testament. He gives them animal sacrifices and he is training them in ceremonial worship. If you read the Old Testament with that knowledge, it will help a lot.

We're talking about a survey of the Old Testament, sort of some overarching principles to think about when you are reading the Old Testament. We talked about genre, covenants, and we talked about how

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the Old Testament is this increasing revelation of the self-donation of God to humanity that culminates in the new covenant, or the New Testament, in Christ. We also talked about the fact that the Old Testament is laid out, and I started this and digressed, like an onion metaphor. You have to peel it from the outside in. In the Old Testament God is dealing with their outward behavior. Just like with children, you worry about their outward behavior. You give them outward rules and talk about outward principles because that is what they know. That is what they understand. With a child you can't talk about holiness. You can't talk about grace. You can, but you can't really teach them the Why of something in its fullness until they know the How of it. You give them things to do and later you may explain why. My mama used to tell me "Because I said so, that's why." Honestly, that would not work with me in the Bible, but he kind of did. There were times, like the Ten Commandments, when he would say "Do this and don't do that." "Don't do this but do that." He's doing it because they are spiritual children and he is teaching them how to worship properly.

The Old Testament lessons are those of children. God's Old Testament people came from polytheism. They didn't have any idea what worshipping one god meant, and - this is the most important thing - they did not have the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to help them recognize or live up to the deeper standard of grace and real holiness. They didn't have the Holy Spirit, and that is ultimately what was "wrong" with the Old Testament. They weren't ready for that yet. They weren't ready for any of it so God didn't give it to them, but he will with the New Testament. He is preparing them in the Old Testament to think and work more deeply when their development is ready for it. In the same way, the Church teaches that God provided outward behaviors and boundaries through the law of Moses in the Old Testament that would keep the Old Testament children safe and teach them how to properly worship until he could lead them to the advent of the New Testament Messiah. There is a theological term for that, and it is called progressive pedagogy. He's progressively teaching the people.

In Isaiah, I believe, it says that God does that with us. Line upon line, precept upon precept, and he does that because that is the why we are made. Physically we are only able to accumulate knowledge in bits, in sensory bits, both of time and information. Our senses gather information in increments of time. We are constantly building on what we got before. That is why God teaches that way. He does that in your life, today. He is doing it right now. You have begun and God is continually teaching you little by little. He does that because at some point he wants to move to deeper truths, the inward behaviors that motivate your outward behaviors, your patterns. We talked about that all kinds of way in my book "Unleashed", so if you haven't gotten it and haven't read it, get it because it will help you identify what your patterns of behavior are so that God can begin to speak to you about your inward motivations.

That's what the New Testament is about, so that he can move to that deeper truth in an upward heavenly momentum. The Bible says that the family of God had been outwardly tutored, as St. Paul said, disciplined and kept safe by the Old Testament law through their history, the whole history of the Old Testament. He is waiting to be able to probe and correct the spiritual and invisible behavior of his people at the proper time. That is in Galatians 3:23-25. He was faithful to give himself completely in Christ when the time came. That's when Jesus began to speak of eternal life, not your physical life but your eternal life; not literal water but living water; not literal enemies as in the nations that surrounded them, but spiritual enemies and territory; heavenly leadership, spiritual worship and sacrificial offering. The principle is outward to inward. Outward concerns behavior. When we read and study the Old Testament we have to keep that purpose in mind, the What is the purpose of the Old Testament. The New Testament includes and addresses the interior soul along with outward behavior.

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That inward includes our interior perceptions and beliefs and those motivations underneath the outward behaviors.

If you think of DNA, all of the cells of our bodies have that DNA, and if you uncoiled that winding double helix structure of DNA there is a science magazine that says it would stretch all the way from here to Pluto and back. All of that biological information, that whole code of life in each human body, is packaged in two corresponding, winding, ladder-like strands. God works a little bit like that too. For us, in the New Testament, he is working on our outward behavior and our inward motivations at the same time in this upward directed spiral that leads straight into his arms. That seeming paradox of the Holy Spirit outward, inward, and upward spiral action at the same time is sort of paradox, the historical Catholic writers and spiritual directors say.

That is the story in a nutshell of the Old Testament. God rescues his people from slavery, he wanders around with them teaching them in the desert, preparing them to receive their promised land; then we have the story of how they come in and they conquer that promised land. What is interesting is this whole story is a metaphor for our own spiritual lives. That is why the Bible repeats it over and over again in several different books and several different ways. It comes up over and over. You better not forget those Israelites. Remember when they were in the desert. If you actually look at this 200-mile journey of God's family from the slavery of Egypt to the promised land, which was Palestine, they actually didn't take the most direct route. They could have just come up the coast from Egypt along the Mediterranean Sea up to Palestine, but they didn't do that. God led them up to Mt. Sinai and then around and around and around Mt. Sinai for 40 years, then down around the Dead Sea, over to the right-hand side of the Jordan River and then over the Jordan into Palestine. There are lots of reasons for that but I don't have time. You're going to actually have to get the book "Ignite" if you want all of that. Deacon and I lay that all out for you. If you're interested in that, the book "Ignite" is a great first start for Bible Study.

In any case, it's a 200-mile journey but what's kind of frustrating about it is it really should have only taken them a week. It took them 40 years! They went around and around this mountain. You have to know that in the scripture the number 40 comes from the number of gestational weeks in a pregnancy. Symbolically it represents periods of trial, testing, and waiting. The Biblical use of that number 40 comes up over and over again. It rained 40 days and nights during the flood. Jesus was 40 days and nights in the wilderness being tempted. The children of Israel were 40 years in the wilderness. It comes up and over and over but it has a point. It's a journey that always leads to a spiritual time of growth and change. In a euphemistic way it means "however long it took, it was the right amount of time." However long it was for the children of Israel, it was long enough for a lazy doubting generation to be replaced by one that dared to fight for the Promised Land. Once they got to the Promised Land they looked over and surveyed it, and they said "Oh my gosh. There are giants in there." (There really were. They were like 9 feet tall.) The people got scared and they wouldn't go in, even though God said, "This is your land, I will be with you, go and take the land." The people wouldn't do it because they were afraid. The Bible relates over and over that God wouldn't let them enter the Promised Land because they wouldn't be obedient. The people wouldn't go in. They would not be obedient to God and so they forfeited the Promised Land.

Dear One, that can happen to us. God has given us the Promised Land of a fullness of salvation. That means freedom from slavery to sin, your bad habits, your toxic relationships, your terrible repeating circumstances. A lot of times a lot of things that happen to us are God trying to get our attention and

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saying “WAKE UP. You’re lazy. You’re disobedient. You’re rebellious. Look at your life. It’s a mess. It’s painful.” You’re in bad health, or bad circumstances, or in debt, or addicted, whatever it is. Whatever it is, Dear One, your Promised Land is freedom. Jesus bought it with his own blood. If you are not moving toward that Promised Land you are stagnant in the spiritual life, and what happens is you forfeit the Promised Land. It can ultimately cause us to forfeit heaven because we are ultimately too lazy to get there. We don’t want to fool with what it takes to persevere with God all the way. Maybe we think that we’ve come so far and we’re going to rest on our laurels, but that is not the way the religious and spiritual life works. St. Paul said it requires perseverance, the book of Hebrews says, to lay hold of the promises that God wants to give us. I don’t want that to happen to you, Dear One. I want you to look at the children of Israel, see that story in the Old Testament, and know that it is both an encouragement and a warning to us that the Promised Land has been provided. All we have to do is be obedient to God. That is my prayer for you until we meet again next week.

