

Four Landmarks

in Christian Experience



by Brian Parr

*When Israel, by divine command,
The pathless desert trod,
They found throughout the barren land
A sure resource in God.*

*A cloudy pillar marked the road,
Their food was bread from heav'n;
From the hard rock the water flowed -
Supplies divinely giv'n.*

*Like them, we have a rest in view,
Secure from hostile powers;
Like them, we pass a desert too:
But Israel's God is ours.*

*His word a light before us spreads,
By which our path we see;
His love, a banner o'er our heads,
From harm preserves us free.*

*Jesus, the lowly One, is giv'n
To be our daily food;
Within us dwells the spring from heav'n,
The Spirit of our God.*

*How full, O God, Thy boundless store
Of grace for every day!
We learn thy power and patience more
Throughout our desert way.*

John Newton

Four Landmarks in Christian Experience

*Exodus 12:21-28; 14:10-16; Numbers 21:4-9;
Joshua 3:3 middle - 6; 14-17.*

Introduction

These scriptures refer to four well known landmarks in the history of Israel and they correspond very much with similar landmarks in Christian experience. I hope that we all agree with using the Old Testament as types or examples. Jesus said of the Old Testament scriptures, “**they are they which testify of me**” (John 5:39) and we have plenty of instances in the Word for using these particular scriptures as types of the Lord’s death. The apostle Paul speaks of Christ our passover having been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7) and also about the children of Israel being “**baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea**” (1 Corinthians 10:2). And if we need any higher authority, the Lord Jesus Himself spoke about the brazen serpent - “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, thus must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14). So we are on solid ground tonight in applying these Old Testament scriptures!

We have been singing in our hymn (shown opposite) that “Israel’s God is **ours**”. The same God, the God of Israel, is **our God**. We also sang that Israel’s path was by divine command. That is true for us also; God has called us by the gospel out of darkness to His wonderful light, not to inherit, as Israel, earthly blessings but heavenly blessings, and to be a heavenly people with a heavenly hope. That does not always lay hold of our hearts as it should, but I trust God will impress our hearts with it now and bless His word to us.

So these landmarks are types that will help us to appreciate the importance of the teaching of the Lord’s death. Someone once asked a street preacher, “why are you always speaking about His death. Why don’t you speak about His life?” Well, it is not the Lord’s life that saves us, wonderful and lovely as the life of Jesus was, it is by His **death** and resurrection that we are saved and set free.

These scriptures also indicate to us the **progress** of Israel out from Egypt towards the promised land, and we can gauge our progress by these particular landmarks. Every Christian has had a good **beginning**. Everyone who has had to do with Jesus and who can say “Jesus is mine” has had

a good beginning, and we all have a wonderful **end** before us - glory with Christ! That is the end of the Christian pathway but, you know, in between we are a bit like the children of Israel. We wander in the desert and lose our objective and sense of direction. I thought that God might use these scriptures to give us a renewed sense of spiritual direction in relation to His heavenly calling and the place that we are to share with Christ.

First Landmark - The Paschal Lamb

The scripture I have read in the book of Exodus is a beginning, a first step of faith. God said to His people that it would be the **beginning** of months, the **first** month to them. So it is like the believer's first step in the obedience of faith. The people were in Egypt; they had gone down there when Joseph was exalted in Egypt, but after he died there arose a king who did not know Joseph and the people gradually came under greater and greater oppression. That's the way it is with the god of this world, he gradually brings us into bondage to sin. Here God's people were crying out to Him in relation to their suffering and bondage.

God heard them and He said, I am come down that I might deliver them. It's like the gospel message, you know, and the prophet Isaiah saying: *"He will come himself, and save you"* (Isaiah 35:4). Think of God saying, *"I am come down to deliver them"* (Exodus 3:8) and of how God has come down in the person of Jesus in order that He might set us free. *"Let my son go, that he may serve me"* (Exodus 4:23). It's a wonderful call that God is making in the gospel today, liberating a people, even on earth, to serve Him and to be for His pleasure. God gave mighty signs and miracles to Pharaoh but he did not let the people go. It was not the rivers of blood or the hailstones, the gnats or the frogs that wrought Israel's liberty:

*"No act of power could e're atone,
No wonder-working word
Could, from the brightness of the throne,
Make love's sweet voice be heard.*

*If sinners ever were to know
The depths of love divine,
All Calv'ry's weakness and its woe,
Blest Saviour, must be Thine."*

And so God says “*take a **lamb***”. A lovely illustration, one of the most complete types of the Lord Jesus in the Bible, beginning from Genesis right through to Revelation. John the Baptist says, “*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). When John saw Jesus walking, he refers to him as the One who would take away from before God **all** the sin of the world. What a tremendous thing! Everything offensive to God that has ever been in this world will be removed completely from God’s sight by His wonderful sacrifice.

In Exodus the lamb is firstly presented on our side. Seize for **yourselves** a lamb. The gospel is so personal, isn’t it? We have to do with Jesus in a personal way. God says to Moses “**your lamb**”, the lamb to meet your need shall be without blemish. Wonderful provision of God to meet **my need**. This type particularly speaks of the Lord’s death as sheltering us from judgement. How precious that there is One that I can claim as my own. My lamb! Yes, surely God’s lamb, but also my lamb, the One who would shelter **me** from judgement.

It was to be in the house for four days. They would become acquainted with the unblemished character of that lamb. Jesus was without blemish, He was perfect and pure and holy! Pilate had to say about Him: “*I find **no fault whatever in him***” (John 18:38). So I think that during these four days the father and mother and the family would look on the lamb and say “there’s no reason for that lamb to die”. But it **had** to die in order that the house and family might be sheltered from God’s judgement. God said they were to kill the lamb and they were to take its blood and put it on the lintel and on the doorpost and when He came in judgement He would pass over that house. God said: “*when I see the blood, I will pass over you*”. O how wonderful is the redeeming blood! One of our lovely hymns says:

“Safe through His redeeming blood”

God said “*when I see the blood*”. Do **you** value the blood of Jesus? Well, you know, it’s not **your** valuation or **mine** that saves us from judgement - it’s **God’s** valuation of the blood. Think of how much God values that **precious blood**! Peter says you are not redeemed with “*corruptible things as silver or gold ... but by precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world*” (1 Peter 1:18-20). The blood of Christ was no afterthought. God was

not bringing in a remedy for something unforeseen, the blood of the Lamb was **foreknown** before the foundation of the world. His precious shed blood has met every claim of God; so God could pass over those protected by the blood when He was going through the land of Egypt in judgement. O the precious blood of Jesus! In this scripture the people bowed their heads and worshipped. Does it not bow our hearts in worship tonight, dear Christian friend, as we think of the value of the precious blood of Jesus to God, and the safety that is ours from the judgement of God?

Second Landmark - The Red Sea

Now Pharaoh lets the people go, and they start to leave Egypt, he tells them to go. Six hundred thousand men, possibly up to two and a half million people went **out** of Egypt. God saves us, you know, not just to leave us where we are, but to bring us out from the control of the god of this world, to serve **Him**. So the people come out of Egypt and the next situation they face is the Red Sea. The sea is in front of them, the mountains at the side and Pharaoh with the best of his army pursuing them from behind. It seemed an impossible situation. Yet having led His people out, was God going to fail them? God - who has *"called you out of darkness to his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9) - will He fail us? Never! He went before them in the cloud and in the pillar of fire and all who are sheltered by the blood of Jesus come in for God's guidance and protection.

Had God made a mistake in leading His people the way of the Red Sea? No! When the people complained, God said, ***"stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord"***. Stand still! Bringing home to them that there was nothing **they** could do! They couldn't have escaped from Pharaoh's power by their own strength and neither could they meet this new situation. The Red Sea speaks to us of Christ's death, as making a way out of this world's system (Egypt) and from under the power of the god of this world (Pharaoh). The sea became a barrier between the people of God and Egypt, and we see in it the total overthrow of Pharaoh, his power being broken completely in the waters of the Red Sea. ***"Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord"***. See what God will do! It is wonderful how God comes in for us when we come up against impossible situations, when we find that we haven't got the answer and there is no way out. That was just the way with Israel, hemmed in with Pharaoh and his army fast coming up behind. O see God's salvation!

You will remember in Luke 2, that Simeon took the holy babe in his arms and said, *“Mine eyes have **seen** thy salvation”*. As he held Jesus, he could speak of *“a light for revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel”*. In an obvious reference to the cross, he said to Mary *“even a sword shall go through thine own soul”* (Luke 2:30-35). There could be no salvation apart from the **death** of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then God says to Moses, *“speak unto the children Israel that they go **forward**”*. Are we standing still in our Christian experience? God said “go forward” when there was no way through the sea. It required a step in faith, and to make progress in Christian experience we have to take new steps in faith. God then told Moses to *“take the staff”* and make a way through the waters, and so the people went through the sea. What a tremendous sight! The waters were still there, not out of sight as at the Jordan. The viewpoint at the Red Sea is that God was making a way through for His people. The waters were a wall to them on the right hand and on the left, reminding us that the death of Jesus is a very personal thing. The people went over and when they had gone over, the waters returned and the armies of Egypt were destroyed in the sea. The enemy's power was completely broken. So we can think of the death of Jesus as completely breaking the power of the enemy. It says in Hebrews that *“through death he might annul him who has the might of death, that is, the devil; and might set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage”* (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Now the Israelites were able to sing. They did not sing in Egypt but they did sing on the banks of the Red Sea. They took account of the complete victory that God had wrought over Pharaoh, over his armies, over all the power of Egypt. It speaks to our hearts, you know, not only of the death of Jesus but also His resurrection. The victory has been won. No wonder the women and the disciples rejoiced when they realised that Christ was out of death. He was risen. The power of death had been broken. The victory had been won! So the scripture says He *“was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification”* (Romans 4:25). Not only are we, as believers in Jesus, saved from God's coming judgement but we are also forgiven and justified freely by his grace. Sometimes it is said that justification is making us as if we had never sinned at all. That would be a state of innocence like Adam and Eve, but it is much more than that. What God has done in the glory of His salvation is infinitely more than bringing

man to a state of innocence. He clothes us in the righteousness of Christ! We are justified in Christ risen. It is real Christian liberty when we see that in Christ risen every charge is gone and we are absolutely clear before God.

How wonderful to be able to sing:

*“Now I can say I am pardoned,
Happy and justified, free,
Saved by my blessed Redeemer -
This is the Saviour for me.”*

No wonder Israel sang, and we can sing too:

*“Happy day, happy day,
When Jesus washed my sins away!”*

The Red Sea also teaches us about baptism, and Paul refers to that: *“all were baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:2)*. Another definite step forward in faith is when a believer commits himself, by baptism, to the Lord. Baptism is actual, but it is also practical. It is actual once, when we are baptised to Christ in His death, but it is also practical and that is a daily matter. It is really an attitude of mind. We are taught in Romans to *“reckon yourselves dead to sin”* - dead to this sin system all around us - *“and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11)*. So it is a daily matter that as we think about Christ in His death and are committed to that, it becomes a barrier between us and the world’s system, and its god. That is practical salvation.

Third Landmark - The Brazen Serpent

We go now to the book of Numbers where Israel is well on in the journey - and there are older Christians here, well on in their journey, and it is not an easy road. There’s an old hymn that says that:

*“It’s not an easy road we are trav’ling to heaven,
For many are the thorns on the way;”*

And that’s what the children of Israel found. It’s remarkable, isn’t it, that a people so richly blessed by God should suddenly forget all about the

blessings. They also forgot the bondage in which they had been in Egypt and they forgot the wonderful redemption that God had wrought in bringing them out. They forgot about the way they had seen His salvation through the Red Sea and how God had provided the manna for them. They begin to get bitter and complain. How easy that is, you know, in spiritual life to get tired and weary with the way. Do we get tired of the prayer meeting and of Bible teaching? Is it possible that we should get tired of Jesus? Israel said, *“our soul loathes this light bread”*. May it not be true of us!

They are brought now to realise the sin that is **within** their own hearts. So this type is not about being sheltered from judgement or being separated from the world but of learning the sin that is within us. We are all the same, and if we read Romans 7, we'll find that the apostle Paul describes the conflict that went on inside of him. There was that in him which wanted to do what was pleasing to God, but there was this other thing, sin, that worked in him. He didn't really want to sin but that is what he did. It was a struggle, a conflict within and that is what the brazen serpent is teaching us here in the book of Numbers. The Israelites were discovering the sinfulness of their own hearts, and it was enmity against God. That is why God sent serpents to bite them; to show to them the very source, in the serpent, of their complaint and loathing of the manna. What we are by nature will never really appreciate what Jesus is in all His lowly grace and attractiveness.

And so the people began to die. We may feel like that too and the apostle says in Romans 7:24, *“who shall deliver me out of this body of death?”* Yes, a Christian can get to the point of desperation with the struggle within until he cries out, *“who shall deliver me out of this body of death?”* So the people say to Moses, “pray for us”, “we have sinned”. They are tracing things back now and admitting what has been working in their hearts. And God says, *“Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole”* (Numbers 21:8). I think it is an amazing thing that the serpent should be portrayed as a type of Jesus. It is to show us, dear Christian friend, how totally Jesus became identified with what the serpent brought in, with sin! The Bible says, *“Him who knew not sin he has made sin for us”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is what this type is teaching us. How can we be delivered? **Who** shall deliver me out of this body of death? God said that everyone who looks, lives. Everyone who has been bitten by the serpent, who realises the sinfulness of his own nature, everyone who looks, shall live! So turn away from yourself - that is what it means. Look away to Jesus; see Him lifted up for you.

*“There is life for a look at the Crucified One
There is life at this moment for thee.”*

So the people that looked, lived! Oh, it is good to look away from ourselves and all that is within us, and to look to Jesus, who was made sin for us. Not only did He bear our sins but He took upon Himself our lost and ruined condition. God hasn't forgiven the sinful nature of man, he has condemned it! The Word says, God *“has condemned sin in the flesh”* (Romans 8:3). But of course, it is still with us, and will be, until we go to be with Jesus. The desires, the lusts, the fears are still there, but there is this remedy, this wonderful Deliverer! *“I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Romans 7:25). So I can turn away from myself and see that God views me now in Christ. *“There is then now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and of death”* (Romans 8:1-2). So Israel began to journey from this point. Typically, their eyes are off themselves and on Christ lifted up, and they begin to make progress and we find that there is power to sustain them. A little further on there is the water supply, the springing well. We realise that there is power in the Holy Spirit to keep us going, in life, in this journey of faith, with our eye fixed upon Jesus.

Fourth Landmark - The Jordan

We come now to the Jordan. An old gospel song says:

*“One more river to cross
And that's the river of Jordan”*

Jordan is the last great barrier before the promised land. It speaks to us of the power of death and of what death was to Jesus. The Jordan was full over all its banks throughout the days of harvest. You know, when Jesus went into death, it was full. We can see in His life the rising of the flood waters. As He came down from the mount of transfiguration and we follow as He goes to Gethsemane, we can see the waters rising in His blessed soul. He could say, *“Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But on account of this have I come to this hour”* (John 12:27). O how our hearts are surely drawn to Jesus, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth - the greatness, the majesty and the glory of His Person!

So this new step forward is one of affection and attraction to Christ, *“when ye see the ark ... go after it”*. That’s what the disciples of John the Baptist did when he said: *“Behold the Lamb of God”*. They saw the ark and went after it! It says they left him and followed Jesus and *“abode with him that day”* (John 1:35-39). I think typically they got over the Jordan, they got a foretaste of heavenly blessings and a heavenly place. So our scripture says, *“go after it”*, but then it adds, *“there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits”*. We have to recognise there is a difference between the Lord Jesus Christ and us. Although He is our Saviour, our Shepherd and our Friend, we must also remember **Who** He is in the glory of His Person. The hymn says:

*“Thee - the great “I AM” - we worship,
Mighty God, Eternal One!”*

He was going down, down into death. John’s gospel particularly gives us this viewpoint. It says *“he went out, bearing his cross”* (John 19:17). No one could face death if He had not gone before.

*“None could follow there, blest Saviour,
When Thou didst for sins atone;
For those suff’rings deep, unfathomed,
Were, Lord Jesus, thine alone!”*

The ark had to go that way before one single Israelite could have got over into Canaan. Jesus had to go down into death if there was to be a way through for us into heavenly blessings and into a heavenly home. See Him go down; hear that mighty cry upon the cross as He went down into death. No man took His life. He did not die as men die. He delivered up His own spirit. He went down into death by His own power, and death had to bow! When the feet of the priests touched the waters, the waters fled. The Psalmist says, *“what ailed thee, thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou turnest back?”* (Psalm 114:5). Death could not remain in the presence of Jesus. During His life, whenever death came into the presence of Jesus, death had to bow. Whether it was Jairus’s daughter or the son of the widow of Nain or Lazarus of Bethany, death had to yield to the Son of God. That was the power of death over individuals but think of the totality of death; the Jordan **full** over all its banks, when Jesus went down into death. Death was really death to Him. It says in Hebrews that

“he should taste death for every thing” (Hebrews 2:9). He tasted it in its awfulness, but death had to bow. How wonderful that Jesus has broken the whole power of death and has made a way through for us!

The ark stayed in the midst of the Jordan until all the people had completely gone over. Every believer in Jesus will get safe home to glory, and the basis of it all will be this blessed truth that Jesus went down into death, and His finished work is sufficient - yea, more than sufficient, to see every blood-bought saint safe to glory. So, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, and go in for heavenly things, for they are ours. Canaan is a new **place**. God has called us to heavenly blessings and a heavenly place. *“I go to prepare you a place”,* Jesus said, *“and if I go ... I am coming again and shall receive you to myself, that **where I am** ye also may be” (John 14:2).* We are blessed with heavenly blessings!

Canaan does not quite answer fully to heaven, because there are still enemies in the land of Canaan but it does apply to us at the present time. We have to **take possession**; we have to go in for heavenly things if we are to enjoy heavenly blessings. Wherever the children of Israel put their foot, that was their inheritance. I would like to encourage us all, with a fresh sense of direction, as those who have been called by God out from this world, to see that there is a glorious heavenly objective and to go in for it. We often don't feel equal to it, do we? But Caleb and Joshua said to the people *“we are **well able** to do it” (Numbers 13:30).* God has richly provided for us, to guide and lead a heavenly people home. May the Lord encourage our hearts so that we might be more firmly attached to Him and more affected by the great scope of His death, so that we enjoy a little more the heavenly blessings that are ours. May God bless His word to us all for His name sake.

Scripture quotations are from the Authorised Version or the Darby translation.

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