

Manna in the Desert



Pages From My Life's Book (Part 6)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you some of the Keys To Successful Living that God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

In my talks last week I was opening up for you some "Pages from My Life's Book." I was sharing with you in an intimate way personal experiences in my walk with God that had built my faith and shaped my life's destiny.

This week I'll continue with this theme, opening up for you more "Pages from my Life's Book."

But first, let me say "Thank you" to those of you who have been writing to me. Before I finish this talk we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. Feel free to share with us your personal needs, your problems, your prayer requests.

In my talks last week I shared with you about my "Search for Truth" as a young man. Looking for the meaning of life, I had failed to find it in the form of Christianity I was raised in. I turned to philosophy and to yoga, but again I failed to find what I was looking for.

Drafted into the British Army as a hospital attendant in World War II, I decided to study the Bible, only to be disappointed yet once more. I could not find any coherent message in the Bible.

Then I met a Christian family who were different; humble, uneducated, but different. Being with them in their home, I realized two things about them. The first was for them the Bible was a meaningful, up-to-date book and the second was they had a real, personal relationship with God.

Eventually I decided to pray and ask God for whatever this family had. But once again, I was baffled and on the point of giving up. I found I did not know how to pray. I did not know whom to pray to. And then, suddenly, I made contact with two things: a power and a person. Finally I identified both the power and the person. The power was the Holy Spirit, the person was Jesus. I discovered that the truth is a person.

Very soon after I had come to know Jesus in this real and personal way, my company was sent overseas to North Africa

and I spent the next three years in the deserts of North Africa: Egypt, Libya and the Sudan. It is interesting to trace in the Bible how God sometimes used the desert to prepare His people for their future service.

There are some vivid descriptions of desert in the Bible; for example, Jeremiah 2:6:

> "They did not ask, 'Where is the Lord, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives?'"

I remember once in the desert reading that verse to my fellow soldiers and they all agreed that it was an exact description of the situation in which we found ourselves. Let me read those words to you just once more, "a land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives."

The desert strips away from us the non-essentials and brings us down to the basics of life. In the material realm these basics are four. Stated in order of importance they are: water, food, shelter, transportation.

In the spiritual realm also, my years in the desert stripped away many non-essentials and brought me down to the spiritual basics. I am reminded always, when I think back to that time, of how Moses described God's dealings with Jacob; that is, with Israel, when He led them through the desert. This is what Moses says in Deuteronomy 32:10:

> "He [that is, the Lord] found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye."

I see there four successive stages, all of which were fulfilled in my experience. First, the Lord found; then He led; then He instructed; and then He kept. I believe there is a logical order there. After the Lord finds us, He begins to lead us. And, as we are willing to be led by Him, He instructs us. And as we are willing to be instructed, He keeps us. But His keeping us depends on our being led and instructed! Let me read those words again. They are so vivid!

> "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye."

One thing especially that God revealed to Israel in the desert was the real source of nourishment and life. Again I'll read the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 8:2–3, where He reminds Israel of their experience during the forty years in the wilderness:

> "And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."

There is the lesson: that the real source of life is not just physical material bread, but the real source of life is that which comes out of the mouth of the Lord! Another translation says, "the word that comes out of the mouth of the Lord." But the real life source is God and His word and, in order that Israel might learn that, God humbled them, He tested them. And in particular, He allowed them to be hungry. And I will tell you from experience, in the desert being hungry is a test! There were many, many days we really did not have enough to eat. We only had brackish water to drink, and very little of that.

I was in charge of a group of eight men who were called stretcher bearers, though they did very little stretcher bearing. There were also two drivers that shared the driving of the big three ton truck that we traveled through the desert on. So altogether there were ten men and myself on that truck. Before very long, the rest of our company had dubbed us "Prince's Pioneers" because I was the one in charge of this motley group on this truck.

But I'll tell you that being hungry brings things out in you that you don't know are there. I remember how many times it was a test of unselfishness and discipline whether we would be content with our rations or whether we'd try to cheat or one man would try to get some rations that belonged to another man. It really was a humbling experience, but in it all God showed me that He had made provision for my spiritual life through the Bible, the Word of God, and through the Holy Spirit. The Bible was my manna! I lived by that day by day.

I remember the words of Job when he said, "I esteem the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." I could honestly say that was true of me. If I had to choose between

eating or reading the Bible, I chose reading the Bible! I was living by the words that proceeded out of the mouth of God there in that desert!

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul also brings out some of the lessons that God taught Israel during the years in the wilderness in the desert, and he reminded the Christians to whom He was writing that those lessons had an application for them also. This is what he says in 1 Corinthians 10:1–4:

> "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; [our fathers means Israel] and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ."

There were four experiences appointed for all of God's people. All of them shared in those four experiences. The first two experiences were single events: two baptisms; two immersions. All God's people were baptized to Moses, their leader; that is, set apart to Moses as their leader by a double baptism: the baptism in the cloud, which corresponds to the baptism in the Holy Spirit for us as Christians; and the baptism in the sea, which corresponds to water baptism. Those two baptisms set those people apart to Moses their leader. And by our two baptisms in water and in the Holy Spirit, we are set apart to Jesus Christ as our leader!

After that, for Israel in the wilderness there were two ongoing daily experiences: every day they ate of the manna which God provided supernaturally from heaven; and every day they drank of the water from the rock. And Paul says that rock was Christ, the Messiah. So they had a double source of spiritual nourishment: the manna, which corresponds to God's Word; the water, which corresponds to the Holy Spirit.

And so it was in my period there in the desert. I lived by the Word and by the Spirit. In three years in the desert I gained a basic knowledge of the Bible. I read it through a number of times and I discovered that the interpretive Scripture is the Holy Spirit. In God's marvelous provision for us, the Holy Spirit who is the author of Scripture, also becomes our teacher and our interpreter. And I discovered that wherever I needed to know anything in the Scriptures that was practical and relevant to my spiritual life, the Holy Spirit would always lead me to the answer. As a matter of fact, when I started attending churches some years later, I discovered that there's much more in the Bible than we hear about in most churches. And I was disappointed many times at how little the churches had to tell us of the Bible. But I learned one thing which I have always kept with me: I learned to judge the church by the Bible, and not the Bible by the church.

All right. Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll share with you another basic lesson that God taught me in the desert, the lesson of our identification with Christ, first in crucifixion and then in burial.

Radio Program

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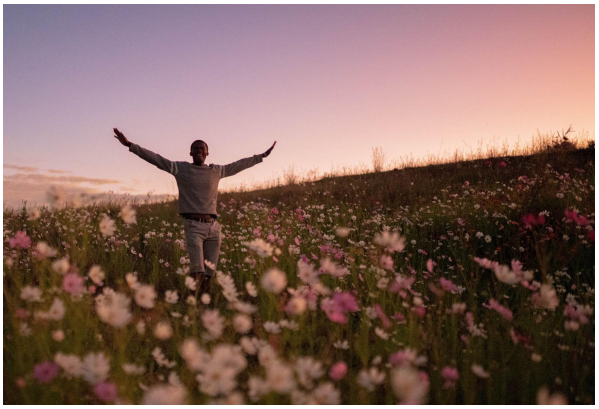

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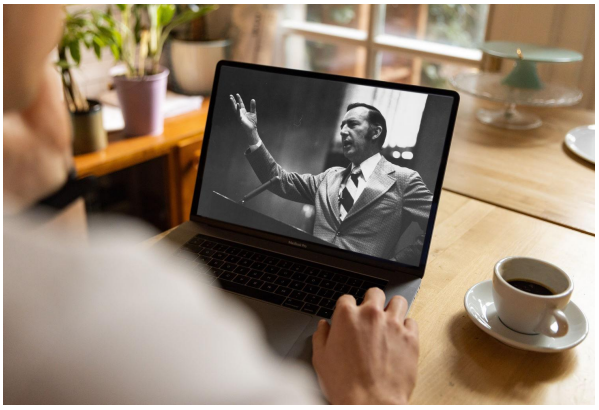

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