

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## Stages In The Journey

by Dan Trygg

“Then Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev-- he, his wife, and all he had, and Lot with him. <sup>2</sup> Abram was very rich in livestock, silver, and gold. <sup>3</sup> He went by stages from the Negev to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had formerly been, <sup>4</sup> to the site where he had built the altar. And Abram worshiped Yahweh there.” Genesis 13:1-4

“Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of Yahweh, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink.” Exodus 17:1

“The Israelites set out whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle throughout all the stages of their journey. <sup>37</sup> If the cloud was not taken up, they did not set out until the day it was taken up. <sup>38</sup> For the cloud of Yahweh was over the tabernacle by day, and there was a fire inside the cloud by night, visible to the entire house of Israel throughout all the stages of their journey.” Exodus 40:36-38

“These are the stages of the people of Israel, when they went out of the land of Egypt by their companies under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. <sup>2</sup> Moses wrote down their starting places, stage by stage, by command of Yahweh, and these are their stages according to their starting places.” Numbers 33:1,2

We often like to think that our spiritual life should look like a smooth, upward pattern of growth. Of course, that is not the case. There are seasons in life, and stages in our journey. Life has its own ups and downs, ...curve balls and fast balls, ...times where the going is relatively smooth and benign, and other times that are very difficult. It should not surprise us that our lives are full of times where we seem to be at a standstill, ...or we seem to be in a time of relative fruitfulness, ...or even a spiritual desert! There seem to be times that are full of learning, growth and preparation, ...and other times where our lives are busy with serving and applying the things we learn. Sometimes God brings people into our path that are important for us to interact with, ...either for them or for us, or maybe a mutually enriching time..., and then God seems to bring that time to a close. It is time to move on. We move on to the next lesson, ...the next challenge, ...the next faith test, ...or the next time of fruitfulness. Sometimes, we seem to be meandering through life, and we kind of lose sight of the objective. We can get stuck in a “stage” in our journey, and do not realize that we should be moving forward. Sometimes God will use very direct communication to move us along. Sometimes it takes circumstances to roust us out of our comfort zone, ...or onto the next “stage”..., because we don't like change, and would not step out on our own, without a “kick in the pants.”

We see in Abram's life that he, like most of us, was a “wanderer”. God called him in Ur, and told him to leave his father's house and his relatives, and go to the land that He would show him. He did not follow Yahweh *fully*, however. He *took* his father with him, and his nephew, Lot. This caused him get stuck in Haran, along the way, ...probably because his father, Terah, got sick. After Terah died, God called Abram again. He finally came into the land, and God revealed Himself to him, again, near Bethel, ...and restated the covenant promise to him. Abram built an altar, and worshiped Yahweh there. But, then we read that Abram *kept wandering*, ...he wandered all the way to Egypt. He got himself in trouble there, but Yahweh delivered him. He made his way back to Bethel, in stages, returning *eventually* to where he had previously built the altar. Stages. Fits and starts. Stopping places. But he *did* make it back, ...and he *worshiped Yahweh* there, again. Can you relate? Can you see times in your life like this?

Some of the “stages in the wilderness” are more memorable than others. Some are memorable because God revealed Himself powerfully to us, ...and some have notoriety because of some test we encountered, and failed. The Israelites, who had recently been delivered miraculously from Egypt by Yahweh, came to a place called “resting places” (Rephidim), but there was no water there (Ex. 17:1). They had followed the leading of Yahweh, but it seemed to lead them to a dead end. The people argued with Moses and Aaron, and grumbled against them. Moses pointed out that their complaining was not against him, it was against Yahweh. They should not be complaining against people, they should be seeking God. Moses then did the right thing, ...he sought God. Yahweh then instructed Moses to take some of the leaders of the people, and travel ahead of the congregation to the Mount called Horeb (“waste, a place of ruin and rubble”). There, he was to strike the rocky cliff with his staff, and water would come out from the rock right in the sight of the elders. It was an amazing, powerful, awesome miracle of God! Psalm 78:20 says that the water “gushed out, and the streams flowed abundantly.” God was the faithful Provider! Nothing was too hard for Him! This experience was memorialized as Massah (“testing, despair”) and Meribah (“strife, complaining”), because the people tested God, saying, “Is Yahweh among us, or not?” Have *you* ever asked that question? God, are you *here*?

Then, immediately following this great answer to their need, the Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites. Joshua was instructed to take men and fight against them. Moses, Aaron and Hur watched from a hilltop. When Moses held his hand up, Israel was prevailing, ...but when he put his hand down, the Amalekites were winning.

Aaron and Hur supported Moses' hands, until victory was secured. Moses built an altar in that place, and referred to it as "Yahweh is My Banner", a reminder that God is the One who unites and leads His people to victory. It is to Him that we are to rally and find our strength. Rephidim was not only a story of failure, but also of provision, ...warfare, and victory. God is the Provider and Protector.

Exodus 40:36-38 recalls that God was leading the Israelites by stages through the wilderness. When the pillar of cloud, or of fire, which signified God's presence, was lifted up, the people would break camp. They would follow the pillar until it stopped. Then, they would set up camp again around it. God very clearly and definitively led them. Sometimes, they would be in one location for some time, ...at other times, they would only camp briefly, and the pillar would rise up again to move them to a new location. This is a good reminder not to get too comfortable. Be ready to move, if God should say so.

Finally, in Numbers 33, we are told that Moses kept a written record of their "stages" in the wilderness. There are over 40 places named, along with some minor commentary about some of these locations, and the events that happened there. They are a record not only of the physical journey of the people, but they also provide an overview of their spiritual journey, as God prepared them to finally enter the land of promise. There were lessons learned along the way that were vital, ...important, foundational lessons..., that readied them for the next part of their spiritual journey. This is not just a list of "place-names". It is a reminder of where they had been, what had been experienced and learned, and it was also recorded for later generations to learn from, as well. In fact, when you think about it, it was recorded almost entirely for those who would come after, ...because virtually all of those who had been adults in the beginning, had died in the wilderness. Those who would have been able to remember the details were gone. Those who were young, and were called to the *next stages* in the story could learn valuable lessons from this record, and the faith history that went with it. The Israelites were getting prepared to cross the Jordan and enter into an entirely new adventure, ...but there would be "stages" in *that* journey, as well.

This is a timely reminder for me, personally. I am living through anniversaries of spiritual "stages" in my life story from fifty years ago. In February of 1971, God spoke to me for the first time, ...in a very clear, undeniable way. He instructed me to write a letter to my uncle, asking if I could come to work on his farm. I didn't want to, but God was insistent, ...and He prevailed over my foolish resistance. I realized the other day, that it was fifty years *this month* that I was there, ...on that farm..., and how that was a very significant "stage" in my spiritual journey. When I look back on what God was doing in my life fifty years ago, I am amazed. I certainly was not planning my own way. Left up to me, I would not have done *any* of the things that happened in that year. But God was at work. He was calling me out. He was directing me. Some of it was very clear (like the encounter with Him in February), but other aspects were very unclear to me at the time, ...even though I was living through them. It is in looking back that I can appreciate them, and can understand better what God was doing in my life.

As I was thinking through this study, I was led to look back into a journal I have kept since 2000. It is 250 pages long. It is not an "every day" kind of journal. It records some of the "stages" in my journey since September 2000. I spent some time scrolling through that, this week, revisiting and recalling old experiences and spiritual lessons from the past. I have not written in it since August 2019, the abrupt closing of a chapter in my journey. Maybe it is time to update some things. There have been "stages" in my journey that I can recognize. There have been people who have come and gone, ...life stories that have gone in one direction or another.

Sometimes, it is valuable to take some time to recount where you have been, ...what you have done and learned along the way. Possibly a good exercise would be to write down a spiritual history of your life. Can you see the handwriting of God in your life? Can you see how He has led you, and directed your steps? Can you see the pitfalls, tests, victories and deliverances you have been through? Are you where you *thought* you would be, ...where you *want* to be, ...where you *could* or *should* be? Can you connect the dots? Can you see where the "staging places" of your life were preparing *you* for what God has for your life? What are the growth edges in your life right now? What has God been teaching you? Where has He been stretching you?

Fifty years ago today, I was in a "staging place" in my life. I didn't have enough perspective to really understand or appreciate what God was doing, ...but I knew He was exposing me to things I had not been exposed to before. I was seeing and experiencing faith in a way that was very different than what I had grown up with. I thought I was there for one reason, ...to help *them*..., but God really had another deeper reason He was working into my life. I was placed there to "help *me*", but I didn't really even know that I "needed help". Now, He *did* use me to help them, but my life was more profoundly changed by my time there than any impact I had on them, or any help I provided their household. None of the people I was living with were preachers or pushed their faith on me. They just lived the life in a way I had not seen before. Their life patterns made time to read the scriptures, ...and so I did, too. Their faith was personal, alive and evident in their lives. God put me right there as an important "staging place" in my life journey. Don't underestimate the effectiveness of your walk. An authentic, sincere walk is powerful.