

950300 Voluntary Choices HLH

Some leave because they had a set of views to which they came to be converted.

There were people in times past, a few in number, one small group whose perspective, I think I could say very clearly, their leader was converted to Herbert W. Armstrong and not Jesus Christ.

I told that to Mr. Armstrong and he agreed, of course.

You may not know of that particular group.

There are people who are converted to a particular set of views.

That is, if you change it, then the person chooses not to remain.

There was a lovely lady many, many years ago who was like that from the Eugene Oregon congregation, a person who made significant contributions to the work in her life and efforts.

But she functioned on the basis of a certain set of views.

And when indeed the church grew at that time to understand, or in one case to reverse a matter, she left, which matter was so small we can call it makeup.

Now, personally, I wouldn't leave the church over that if I were a woman.

And happily, as a man, generally, we don't have to wear it unless we're in West Hollywood.

But it's sad when people make decisions on such small matters and do not know how to cope with them.

I suggested to this lady that she be careful and respectful of those who have left the fellowship to become a part of another where they essentially have a different attitude.

And I can say, as I told her, that I have met some who have left when man stopped.

As I was walking on a sidewalk while he was driving a vehicle, another man was actually walking essentially in the same direction I was, and so we greeted each other in both cases.

And I did not find the same spirit that I remembered before they left.

So I can only tell you that this happens, and to think it doesn't would be untrue.

And for those who do, who do not know that that spiritual change has occurred, they would not see it.

But their behavior becomes different.

And this lady said that in terms of the spirit, even though many of the brethren in this congregation where we have been attending may have different views, I find that those who have left who might even agree more with me don't have the same spiritual attitudes any longer.

So I want you to understand what happens.

It is important also to recognize what this lady has done, and that is how to address the matter of communication in a public situation and in private.

There are, she said, and I will just be very plain. I haven't mentioned the area.

It doesn't matter, but I think it wiser not to.

She said, if I talk with anybody, because she is a kind of remnant of those who had certain views more akin to what is thought to be of the past, she said, others come to me and walk by to hear what I say.

I said, that's very simple to solve. When they do, invite them to stop and chat with you.

But do it in the way that you should do it if Jesus Christ were to knock at your door.

You know, there is a church mentioned in Revelation chapter 3.

A chance is to be the last one. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Jesus knocks at the door of the individual.

Now, if he knocked at your door and you were discussing things, there would be generally two ways of responding.

Some would say, oh, Jesus is there. Let's change the topic.

My premise would be, and I hope it is yours, oh, Jesus is there.

He is the man who can answer the very question we were asking.

I don't have to change the topic.

In other words, if I communicate with you, I'm prepared to assume that you are not really the one that I'm talking to.

It could be anybody else who wishes to come by, and if it is personal and you don't wish it discussed, and we don't discuss it at all in a public situation, we should distinguish between what is wise and what is not wise to discuss.

Now, if you understand this, you will then be able to invite anybody who walks along, and we won't have people who are curious as to why other people are discussing things.

As many of you know, people sometimes stand around with me and I will ask somebody else to come in and invite an identity, because I don't know who all of you may be, and to participate in the conversation.

And if I think there are some things that are not the wiser to discuss, I would simply say, look, that is a question that you should address to personal correspondence department, or that is a question that is better answered by information in a book that could be duplicated, that prevents inaccuracy, or simply that is a question that is being discussed for which no answer is yet forthcoming, or it may be a one that I would regard as sufficiently unwise that I would rather not mention it as an answer, even if I may know.

Now, I advised this morning, and I want you to know not to have the list of the names of the ministers read when our host asked about the question.

Because it doesn't pertain to this area, and it is a decision between the individual and church administration, and in fact, there are still decisions going on, and I think it is simply better not to become so personal that everyone hears names that are not necessarily relevant in your area.

Any that are listed there, to my knowledge, are in the fellowship of the church and have no intention to leave, so let me say that.

But there are ways to go about things that I would like to address here, and we need to perhaps look at what Paul said.

Paul said that the things that happened to the children of Israel were written for our learning.

The things that happened to the children of Israel in the 40 years of wandering were written for our learning.

I must say, I regret today, that there is a tendency not to know what is in the Old Testament as much as we used to be able to communicate.

You see, Paul wrote these letters at a time when the source of his information was not merely the teaching of Jesus Christ, but the written form of the message of God, the Word of God, that we do call the Old Testament.

But not everybody has understood what that part of the Bible is for.

When Mr. D'Coche's letter came out in December, after I had made some suggested edits and had not reviewed it after the final edits were made, and I want to correct something here in case any of you misunderstood or it was not explained fully accurately, I am not responsible and never have been for all that is published in the work.

I was asked to be a general editor and executive editor of the Plain Truth.

I do go over almost all that is in the Pastor General's report, as in the Plain Truth, almost, because necessarily their last-minute captions in the Plain Truth or information that comes to church administration that cannot make the rounds before things are published, but that's simply procedural.

But I do not normally edit the Worldwide News, though if I chose to talk to the editor about something that I would be concerned about in advance, I would ask. I do go over other individual items and do go over the booklets in general, but I do it at that point at which I give my input and I am privileged to be more critical in print on paper than most ministers should ever be in the pulpit.

That is a privilege, let's say, that comes with being an editor and operating in a room.

I might be critical even of how the truth is presented.

I might be critical of something that I do not find adequately demonstrated, but it's between myself and the other editors and I am not the final editor just so you know, and don't misunderstand anything that may have been said.

But it is important now to take a look at the significance of the experience that Paul draws attention to.

But before I go to the wilderness wandering, let me give you another illustration that some in the ministry may have heard, interestingly.

There was a time that there were two individuals in a garden and the eternal God was not there to communicate directly to Adam and Eve, so you know the setting, but another personality was there.

Certain things occurred that upset the minds of Adam and Eve and it came to them that they should sow fig leaves together, and no sooner had they done that than they heard God, shall we say, coming to himself or whatever you wish, in a form that was visible and audible and God got there just too late.

If only God would have been on time, the problem wouldn't have happened.

Now the late Mr. God has something to answer for then, doesn't he? Because he should have been there to stop what had occurred.

Why didn't he? Why was he late? Well, that's a sermon in itself.

But let's go to another case.

Why did God take the children of Israel not to the Promised Land, but he took them away from the Promised Land down the shores to the shores of the Sea of Reeds or the Red Sea? They had in fact gone in the direction that led them to the walls on the eastern side of Egypt that separated modern Egypt proper from the region of the Sinai Peninsula, and instead of heading the simple direction on the way of the Philistines, where a mighty God could certainly have put an end to any Philistine army, God led them down into a wilderness area.

It wasn't one long wall so that they had a wilderness area, and instead of leading them on the eastern side of the Gulf of Suez, he got them trapped on the west side.

But didn't God know geography any better than that? If God was God, why did he ever lead them to the shores of the Red Sea and do nothing about Pharaoh's army that suddenly showed up? I want you to think about it.

God wasn't there in the Garden of Eden in time.

He made the mistake of leading them to the western shore of the Gulf of Suez, and now with Pharaoh's army, who weren't swallowed up in some earthquake, the Israelites were trapped.

Now you had a choice.

Jesus Christ exemplifies that in his life.

Not my will but thine be done, he said to the Father, and so the eternal God said to Moses, listen carefully, he said, jump right in and swim.

That's your only chance.

No, he didn't at all.

He just said, sit still, stand still.

Will you sit and some stand, let's say? But stand still and watch what God will do.

Watch what God will do.

Well, the rest of the story is important.

God did do something, but sometimes people want to do something in advance.

Then after the crossing of the Red Sea, you have the story of the children of Israel at Sinai, which we will pass by, and take them the next year to the border of the promised land on the south, near the city of Arad in the upper Negev.

And there were men who were searching out the land, which was necessarily a military custom, and came back and after 40 days wandering delivered a report.

Out of the 12, there were two who delivered a good report, and ten who delivered a bad one.

Now, there was a later time when Aaron's two sons, listen carefully, offered an offering by fire that was inappropriate, and no sooner had they sought to present an inappropriate offering that God from the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacles zapped them, and they were dead.

Now, why didn't God zap the ten who brought the evil report? Do you notice God doesn't always do the thing the same way? In one case, he let them deliver the evil report, and in another case, he punished two men, and they were instantly dead.

Beruza at the Ark, you probably would have said that that was going to an extreme.

But why did God let the ten give a report? Because this was to be a test, a test of the children of Israel and a test of those who were sent to bring back a report.

God intended that Adam and Eve should be tested.

God tested Abraham and asked him to do something, and Abraham showed he was willing to do that, and God stopped it at that instant.

God told the children of Israel, trust me, but he didn't explain how, and the children of Israel were delivered across the Red Sea.

Now, when the children of Israel heard the false report, which you will find written up in the Book of Numbers in detail, the remarkable thing is that they decided to believe the false reports as a whole, and the children of Israel made an interesting decision.

Some of them said, in any case, we will go up anyway when God said, you're not going to go up, you will spend the remainder of a 40-year period, they had already been more than one year in the wilderness, so they were going to have to spend 40 years in the wilderness altogether.

And some said, no, you told us we were to go in, we've changed our minds, we're going to take it anyway, and it's interesting what happened.

Without God's help, those who thought that they ought to go in, who first had believed the wrong reports, and then changed their minds, were beaten by the Canaanites, and some perished.

God and those who were willing to follow the instruction of Moses had already left the camp and moved south, and the refugees of those who were pursued by the Canaanites learned a lesson.

And the children of Israel were tested for 40 years in the wilderness.

They also had a responsibility to train their children.

Now Paul tells us that all these things were written for our learning.

It would have been nice, wouldn't it, to have inherited the land of Canaan, which God had promised.

But no, you had to spend, let's say you were 50 years of age, you had to spend a little less than another 40 years, or you would be essentially in your late 80s before you would see the Promised Land.

Now that generation, in fact, did die except for Joshua.

The women are not directly mentioned as to who did or who did not, and Caleb, even Moses and Aaron and the sister, died.

But it was important to realize that there is perhaps more than you think to a time of testing.

And we are going through in the church today a time of testing, of testing your intellect, of testing your mind, and testing your attitudes in your spiritual state.

This is a test of the ministry.

This is a test of parents.

This is a test of brothers and sisters, as children, in a family.

This is a test of administration.

The 40 years wandering was also a test.

Now what had to happen in those 40 years was very important.

In fact, looking back, we can now see what that generation couldn't see.

The generation that came out of Egypt was not prepared to look at things as God had explained them at Sinai.

They were not prepared to have the concept of the forgiveness of debt.

They were not prepared to understand property rights as God laid them out with respect to the Jubilee year.

They were, in fact, looking at things through Egyptian eyes.

And that generation was not physically, emotionally, or mentally prepared to establish the culture, the traditions, the law, the practice, the way of life that God was laying out for the children of Israel, the judicial system, the civil, the religious system.

There was to be an example of enlightenment to the world around.

But the children of that generation, some of whom were young when they came out of Egypt, had 40 years to learn.

They had 40 years to learn what life was about.

They were tested and tested and tested.

And God was always leading them in some way that they had to meet a new problem.

God has not promised you that you would not have problems.

He has said he would not test you beyond your endurance.

And if you think you're beyond your endurance, what you are really telling God is you're not prepared to endure in whatever area this test may be.

When that generation died that was older and the new generation entered the Promised Land, we have something very interesting that we read about.

After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel under the elders continued to maintain the way of life that God laid out at Sinai and through Moses spoke in the book of Deuteronomy, which is the book of the law.

That generation did the will of God.

Now, that doesn't mean they were all converted. This is not what I am saying.

But they did the will of God as it was laid out in the letter of the law in the Old Covenant.

And as a result of that, a new way of life and culture was firmly established.

Now, many of us come from outside the fellowship of the church.

I am speaking now as someone much older than when I came into the fellowship of the church.

Some of you are first generation born into a congregational relationship and some few may be already second and who knows here there could be third if children are very young.

But growing up in the church and growing up outside the church do change perspectives.

And I would like to address this to help you understand.

I am, of course, asked to speak this afternoon and some things I will address now.

I will not address this afternoon and in the afternoon there will be people who will hear other aspects of what I am addressing and you can share with one another what you may learn or acquire.

When one comes from another fellowship, usually Christian or Jewish, sometimes Reformed Hindu or Muslim in Africa, or simply secular or atheist, and we do have people from various groups including even the Chinese family religions, if we want to call it that way, and who knows what other backgrounds.

There is a Zoroastrian who is in the church whom I have known now for a number of years.

If you don't know anything of that religion, that is the religion of old Persia before Islam, the religion that was dominant in Persia in the days of Zerubbabel, for example.

Most Zoroastrians come from India, a competent group of business people.

When you come from the outside, you tend to shed certain things that you have in your background or retain them depending on those circumstances.

When you grow up in the fellowship of the church, there is however another experience.

You discover that you in some way are associated culturally with the behavior of the church and find that out in the world, religious or otherwise, there are attitudes toward what you may have.

And a person who, for example, thought that Jesus Christ was born on December 25th, may have a shock and react to things pertaining to Christmas when he discovers that it is not provable.

It is an opinion.

Now, if you're in the fellowship of the church, you may already have heard that it is not provable and an opinion, but the person who comes from the outside makes an association of all the other things pertaining to Christmas as an illustration, makes an association of those things with it.

And when he is persuaded, if he is or she is, those are set aside.

When you are in the fellowship of the church, you either may attach yourself firmly to the absence of Christian traditions or you may react and wonder why you're being pointed out as one who doesn't follow Christmas traditions.

And so some children in the church grow up wishing they were like the world was and some grow up knowing they're not like it is.

And so as we mature in the church, we may react to different things differently and we may not even know exactly why the church thinks as it does.

So when Mr. Tkach read that letter that went out to the members and then in the Worldwide News, in December he asked me what I thought of his first letter and I said with respect to the old covenant comments and new covenant comments, especially the emphasis on the new covenant, I said the church should have understood that decades ago.

Now, let me explain something here.

The church is made up of people who had heard about the old and new covenant for decades.

I came from an outside environment and some have grown up in the church fellowship.

Do you mean repentance should precede baptism? The answer is yes.

And is baptism voluntary? The answer is yes.

I hope you're hearing carefully.

Did I say repentance is done away because it's voluntary or that baptism is done away because it's voluntary? But it is voluntary.

Whether you come to the services here is still voluntary even if you understand what the church is teaching today, which is point one, that we are commanded to assemble with one another, point two, that it is a tradition for us to do it on the Sabbath.

But you still are expected to be here voluntarily and if it isn't voluntary and you feel compelled, you are not writing and letting the Spirit of God or Jesus Christ, however you want to view the agency, writing it in you.

I have been attending church voluntarily for 47 years and a half.

I've been attending it voluntarily.

It has become, let's say, a way of life.

And I learned also that I learned things I had never seen before in the Bible by taking note of the annual festivals that God gave to the children of Israel as distinct from what the Romans and the Greeks and all the other nations Egyptians had in the Middle East.

I learned things from those festivals because I observed them voluntarily with the church.

And I'm astonished that I am right when I say that people who never observed the Sabbath have never understood some things about the Sabbath and about what it means.

And people who have never observed the holy days, as the church had called them and sometimes still does, or the festivals of God who had in fact impudiated them, have never fully understood what they could mean.

Now, if the church learned this much and by our experience learned significantly that Jesus Christ came to die and that we have to wrestle with human nature and not let sin dominate us and Christ's sacrifice where we lose a wrestling match pays for sins that we commit, that we cannot wrestle without the Spirit of God, that indeed the Christian life and the life of the church will culminate with the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection will lead to a world that is quite different from our world today, of which the prophets give witness.

The degree to which I forget what those days mean by not being in voluntary attendance is the degree to which darkness begins to descend on one.

When I decide it doesn't matter one way or another what the church is saying is its tradition.

When I read how little is known today of what God will do when Jesus Christ returns, I realize there are people whose heart has never understood what those festivals should have meant that focused on harvesting, that focused on a sacrifice, that focused on in-gathering, that understood that indeed the whole world has lain in darkness and much of the world has never understood a message.

All of those things we learned by being present on Sabbath days and festivals.

If people were attending the Sabbath and festivals and tithing and eating clean foods meets because the church compelled them, because they thought the church required it for you to be a member, those people's Sabbath-keeping presence on the festivals, avoiding certain foods, that means nothing because they weren't internalizing anything.

You can be here if you don't really want to but feel compelled to or bound to.

Mr. Armstrong in the first volume of the autobiography made it quite clear to his younger daughter when she once said, I don't want to go to church today, and he said, well, we understand.

I don't want to be compelled to, but he said, you've never been.

You voluntarily come and if you want to stay home, that is your decision.

But we'll be leaving shortly and we'll come back and there are things, of course, that you'll be here alone and can do.

And when she realized she was going to be alone, she volunteered to go.

I hope you haven't forgotten that story.

The argument over whether it's required or voluntary is a false argument because if it is voluntary, look what happens, there are people who say, if it's voluntary, I won't do it, and I've had people tell me that.

If I were to say to a certain person, someone who's been in the church that baptism is voluntary, that person would say that's not true, it's required.

And I would say in turn, do you mean that baptism has merit if you feel it's required and do it and don't choose to do it voluntarily? You see, some people assume if it's voluntary, there is no reason for it.

They assume that if it's required, I should do it whether I like to or not.

And neither of those are valid explanations of the words voluntary or required.

The New Covenant is a relationship in which God seeks to live his life through the Holy Spirit and the presence of Jesus Christ in us.

And it is all voluntary, which means, listen carefully, that you have lots of things to think about and learn to do.

Not because it's voluntary, I won't pay any attention to all the things that are described in the Bible.

Now, when we have people in the church today, after some of our friends leave the fellowship of the church, we discover that we are not all yet in the unity of the faith.

I discovered that it is important, more important than to understand a particular thing, to know how, listen carefully, to deal with that and how to deal with our interrelationships with another.

There are people who understand an argument.

There are people who understand a doctrine.

And as far as they're concerned, it is an argument and a doctrine.

It may mean something strictly intellectual that you don't do anything about, or it may mean something you do, and so some people feel that they are righteous for doing it.

But that is the wrong motive.

One should do that which pleases God, and one should examine the scripture, and one should learn how we go about interrelating to one another.

I told the lady from this other area who felt somewhat alone, I said, look, this is not the time to engage in discussions verbally when a church is sensitized.

What you should do is invite people to communicate with you and step up and communicate with others who may even have, from your own point of view, a different perspective.

You will find, if you do, there are people that you can communicate with freely.

There are people whom you cannot communicate with as freely.

I find I can discuss things of a religious nature with people of various religions.

My wife and I have Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant friends, not to separate the last two, but there are reasons, because sometimes we focus on Protestantism and that's only a part of a greater whole.

We have people of different backgrounds that we can communicate with and share many things with.

How much more should we be able to share with the Spirit of God in us? So we need to learn to be patient, not to bring up irritating questions and know when to be able to give an answer as to why you do certain things.

If I meet somebody, and I do, my wife does, we have Catholic friends who eat foods that we don't, we have Jewish friends, I'll never forget an interesting story, Svi Ankori, a Byzantine Jewish scholar, that is of the later Roman Empire, I invited him out to an evening meal.

It was a reformed Jew, and we went to a Chinese restaurant where it was possible to get lamb, and he ordered some other things, typical of Chinese cuisine, from the sea.

He made his first order, and then the man with me and I, and we all had placed our order, and two of us, I'm not sure if our wives were there at that time, we had asked for lamb, and the waiter was taking the request away, and our Jewish friend, Svi Ankori, he said, wait a moment, make mine lamb too.

He thought about it.

He didn't trouble me, whether he did or did not, I am not his judge, but I will have to give an account to God, and I want to be able to give an account so clear that there will be nothing that I have overlooked in Old or New Testament.

When an explanation is incomplete, I complete the explanation and arrive at a conclusion, because not every verse in the Bible can be examined in a logical presentation or in a sermon, but you need to see all that is said, and you need to know why it is said and how you would account for that in the judgment.

But I can still be friends and I can sit here, according to contemporary church tradition, and understand if you do not fast on the day of Atonement, and I do.

You will offer your explanation, and I will offer mine, in the judgment.

But I am the kind of person who likes to engage in what Luther, Martin Luther, called Tisch-leid, or table talk.

My wife and I might call it pillow talk.

I don't know how you get along with your wife or your husband, but at table talk we discuss things that do not determine the fate of the world.

That is, we discuss things on which we might differ, or for which there could be no precise statement.

So I have no problem with discussing where I would have a difference.

That is why I can discuss things with people of other faiths, all together.

And I can culturally understand and appreciate without sitting in judgment.

So I learn over time not to touch sensitive issues, to touch issues that another person would enjoy discussing.

I know that there are people who don't like to discuss differences, and Americans are like that.

The pastors who were here probably heard me tell a story of a Greek restaurateur.

They will remember it, so they will pardon my addressing it.

A Greek restaurateur coming to this country was shocked by an American characteristic, which is characteristic of many people in the Church of God, because we are living in America.

That when you meet someone and chance to socialize with the person and discover that that person is a Republican, not a Democrat, or a Baptist, and not an Episcopalian, that may be the last time you have any special social relationship.

That is, if there is no real agreement politically or religiously, whatever the main area of your life is, or in other customs, there is no real continuation of friendship.

Now, the Greeks in general are different.

If all your friends agree with you, there is nothing to argue over.

But if you meet a person in Greece who differs from your opinion, you are to have another dinner with him, because there is more to discuss.

And it's a difference in personality.

So I'd like to suggest that you examine your own traits here.

But what had occurred? Why didn't he? Why was he late? Well, that's a sermon in itself.

But let's go to another case.

Why did God take the children of Israel, not to the Promised Land, and took them away from the Promised Land down the shores to the shores of the Sea of Reeds, or the Red Sea? They had, in fact, gone in the direction that led them to the walls on the eastern side of Egypt, that separated modern Egypt proper from the region of the Sinai Peninsula, and instead of heading the simple direction on the way of the Philistines, where a mighty God could certainly have put an end to any Philistine army, God led them down into a wilderness area.

It wasn't one long wall, so that they had a wilderness area, and instead of leading them on the eastern side of the Gulf of Suez, he got them trapped on the west side.

But didn't God know geography any better than that? If God was God, why did he ever lead them to the shores of the Red Sea and do nothing about Pharaoh's army that suddenly showed up? I want you to think about it.

God wasn't there in the Garden of Eden in time.

He made the mistake of leading them to the western shore of the Gulf of Suez, and now with Pharaoh's army, who weren't swallowed up in some earthquake, the Israelites were trapped.

Now, you had a choice.

Jesus Christ exemplifies that in his life, not my will but thine be done, he said to the Father, and so the eternal God said to Moses, listen carefully, he said, jump right in and swim.

That's your only chance.

No, he didn't at all.

He just said, sit still, stand still.

Some of you sit and some stand, let's say, but stand still and watch what God will do.

Watch what God will do.

Well, the rest of the story is important.

God did do something, but sometimes people want to do something in advance.

Then, after the crossing of the Red Sea, you have the story of the children of Israel at Sinai, which we will pass by, and take them the next year to the border of the promised land on the south, near the city of Arad in the upper Negev.

And there were men who were searching out the land, which was necessarily a military custom, and came back and after 40 days wandering, delivered a report.

Out of the 12, there were two who delivered a good report and 10 who delivered a bad one.

Now, there was a later time when Aaron's two sons, listen carefully, offered an offering by fire that was inappropriate, and no sooner had they sought to present an inappropriate offering that God from the holy of holies in the tabernacle zapped them, and they were dead.

Now, why didn't God zap the ten who brought the evil report? Do you notice God doesn't always do the thing the same way? In one case, he let them deliver the evil report, and in another case, he punished two men, and they were instantly dead.

Remember Uzzah at the Ark? You probably would have said that that was going to an extreme.

But why did God let the ten give a report? Because this was to be a test, a test of the children of Israel and a test of those who were sent back a report.

God intended that Adam and Eve should be tested.

God tested Abraham and asked him to do something, and Abraham showed he was willing to do that, and God stopped it at that instant.

God told the children of Israel, trust me, but he didn't explain how, and the children of Israel were delivered across the Red Sea.

Now, when the children of Israel heard the false report, which you will find written up in the book of Numbers in Detail, the remarkable thing is that they decided to believe the false reports as a whole, and the children of Israel made an interesting decision.

Some of them said, in any case, we will go up anyway when God said, you're not going to go up, you will spend the remainder of a 40-year period, they had already been more than one year in the wilderness, so they were going to have to spend 40 years in the wilderness altogether.

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But no, you had to spend, let's say you were 50 years of age, you had to spend a little less than another 40 years, or you would be essentially in your late 80s before you would see the promised land.

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The women are not directly mentioned as to who did or who did not, and Caleb, even Moses and Aaron and the sister, died.

But it was important to realize that there is perhaps more than you think to a time of testing.

And we are going through in the church today a time of testing, of testing your intellect, of testing your mind, and testing your attitudes in your spiritual state.

This is a test of the ministry, this is a test of parents, this is a test of brothers and sisters, as children, in a family.

This is a test of administration.

The 40 years wandering was also a test.

Now what had to happen in those 40 years was very important.

In fact, looking back, we can now see what that generation couldn't see.

The generation that came out of Egypt was not prepared to look at things as God had explained them at Sinai.

They were not prepared to have the concept of the forgiveness of debt.

They were not prepared to understand property rights as God laid them out with respect to the Jubilee year.

They were, in fact, looking at things through Egyptian eyes.

And that generation was not physically, emotionally, or mentally prepared to establish the culture, the traditions, the law, the practice, the way of life that God was laying out for the children of Israel, the judicial system, the civil, the religious system.

There was to be an example of enlightenment to the world around.

But the children of that generation, some of whom were young when they came out of Egypt, had 40 years to learn.

They had 40 years to learn what life was about.

They were tested and tested and tested.

And God was always leading them in some way that they had to meet a new problem.

God has not promised you that you would not have problems.

As I said, he would not test you beyond your endurance.

And if you think you're beyond your endurance, what you are really telling God is you're not prepared to endure in whatever area this test may be.

When that generation died that was older, and the new generation entered the promised land, we have something very interesting that we read about.

After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel under the elders continued to maintain the way of life that God laid out at Sinai and through Moses spoke in the book of Deuteronomy, which is the book of the law.

That generation did the will of God.

Now, that doesn't mean they were all converted. This is not what I am saying.

But they did the will of God as it was laid out in the letter of the law in the Old Covenant.

And as a result of that, a new way of life and culture was firmly established.

Now, many of us come from outside the fellowship of the church.

I am speaking now as someone much older than when I came into the fellowship of the church.

Some of you are first generation born into a congregational relationship, and some few may be already second, and who knows here there could be thirds if children are very young.

But growing up in the church and growing up outside the church do change perspectives.

And I would like to address this to help you understand.

I am, of course, asked to speak this afternoon, and some things I will address now.

I will not address this afternoon, and in the afternoon there will be people who will hear other aspects of what I am addressing, and you can share with one another what you may learn or acquire.

When one comes from another fellowship, usually Christian or Jewish, sometimes Reformed Hindu or Muslim in Africa, or simply secular or atheist, and we do have people from various groups including even the Chinese family religions, if we want to call it that way, and who knows what other backgrounds.

There is a Zoroastrian who is in the church, whom I have known now for a number of years, if you don't know anything of that religion, that is the religion of old Persia before Islam, the religion that was dominant in Persia in the days of Zerubbabel, for example.

Most Zoroastrians come from India, a competent group of business people.

When you come from the outside, you tend to shed certain things that you have in your background, or retain them depending on those circumstances.

When you grow up in the fellowship of the church, there is, however, another experience.

You discover that you, in some way, are associated culturally with the behavior of the church, and find that out in the world, religious or otherwise, there are attitudes toward what you may have.

And a person who, for example, thought that Jesus Christ was born on December 25th, may have a shock and react to things pertaining to Christmas when he discovers that it is not provable.

It is an opinion.

Now, if you're in the fellowship of the church, you may already have heard that it is not provable and an opinion, but the person who comes from the outside makes an association of all the other things pertaining to Christmas as an illustration, makes an association of those things with it.

And when he is persuaded, if he is or she is, those are set aside.

When you are in the fellowship of the church, you either may attach yourself firmly to the absence of Christian traditions, or you may react and wonder why you're being pointed out as one who doesn't follow Christmas traditions.

And so some children in the church grow up wishing they were like the world was, and some grow up knowing they're not like it is.

And so, as we mature in the church, we may react to different things differently, and we may not even know exactly why the church thinks as it does.

So when Mr. Tkach read that letter that went out to the members and then in the Worldwide News, in December he asked me what I thought of his first letter, and I said with respect to the old covenant comments and new covenant comments, especially the emphasis on the new covenant, I said the church should have understood that decades ago.

Now, let me explain something here.

The church is made up of people who had heard about the old and new covenant for decades.

I came from an outside environment, and some have grown up in the church fellowship.