

FROM BITTER EXPERIENCE TO VICTORY

Joshua 5:9

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Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So, the place has been called Gilgal to this day.

The *Gilgal* is similar to the Hebrew word *galal* which means "to roll." But what was "the reproach of Egypt"? Some suggest that this means their reproach for being slaves in Egypt, but it wasn't Israel's fault that the new pharaoh turned against them (*Ex 1:8ff*). The Jews were in Egypt because God had sent them there (*Gen 46:1-4*), not because they were disobedient.

But that older generation was now dead, and the younger Israelites certainly shouldn't be blamed for the sins of their fathers. Furthermore, it's difficult for me to see the relationship between crossing the river, circumcision, and the Jews' idolatry in Egypt.

"The reproach of Egypt" refers to the ridicule of the enemy when Israel failed to trust God at Kadesh Barnea and enter the Promised Land. When Aaron made the golden calf at Mount Sinai and the people broke God's law, God threatened to destroy them and make a new nation from Moses.

But Moses argued that God would lose glory if He did that, because the Egyptians would only say that God delivered them in order to kill them (*Ex 32:1-12*). At Kadesh Barnea Moses used the same appeal when God said He would destroy Israel (*Num 14:11-14*). Moses didn't want the Egyptians to spread the word that the God of Israel couldn't finish what He had started.

Israel's sin at Kadesh Barnea was a reproach to them, but now that was all in the past. The nation was actually in the Promised Land! They had captured the territory east of the Jordan, and their people were already occupying it (*Num 32*). They had crossed the Jordan River and were ready for conquest.

No matter what the Egyptians and the other nations had said about Israel because of their sin at Kadesh Barnea, that reproach was now completely gone. Each man bore on his body the mark that reminded him that he belonged to God

He was a son of the covenant, and the land was his to conquer and possess. The 430 years of bondage in Egypt had brought reproach upon Abraham's descendants in the eyes of the world. Their reproach had done untold damage to their psyche. In Egypt they had been humiliated and ostracized to the point that they thought that slavery was the natural way of life.

They often pleaded with Moses in the wilderness to be allowed to go back into bondage rather than suffer the wilderness experience.

The reproach of the world sought to draw them back into slavery. They had suffered such a great loss of self-esteem that it was all but impossible to lead them to a better way of living. The road ahead of them was difficult but it was the road that would lead them to share in God's glory.

God had led the Israelites as they were kicking and screaming through their forty-year wilderness journey. The forty years of bondage had convinced them that there was nothing better ahead of them.

They couldn't imagine that a gracious God was seeking to take away their reproach. As Israel approaches the land of promise after their forty years of kicking and screaming in the wilderness, God reveals his plan to roll away their reproach. At that time the LORD said to Joshua, *'Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.'*

So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.

Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt—all the men of military age—died in the desert on the way after leaving Egypt.

All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not. The Israelites had moved about in the desert forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the LORD.

For the LORD had sworn to them that they would not see the land that he had solemnly promised their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way. And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.

Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the place has been called Gilgal to this day" (NIV).

God seeks give Israel a new identity as he rolls away the reproach of

Egypt. God's rolling away their past was an important aspect of Israel's inheritance of the Promised Land. Israel was ready to claim God's new identity for them.

Overcoming our past is the most difficult part of a new beginning. The world won't allow us to forget our past. Often, we think God imposes the reproach of guilt and shame upon us, but these are things the world's system imposes upon us. Guilt and shame enslave us to further guilt and shame through self-hatred and self-rejection.

This is why God's rolling away the reproach of the guilt and shame of sin is an important part of our salvation. It signifies the new identity God has given us. It is no accident that the Bible speaks of those enslaved to sin. Satan's world order of things seeks to enslave us to the reproach of this world.

Most of our problems in life result from the way we feel about ourselves. If we don't feel that we deserve God's blessings we won't live so as to avail ourselves of his blessings. How do we look upon those who have been disgraced? More importantly, how do those who have been disgraced look upon themselves? Disgrace means to fall from a place of honor. It is to lose favor or standing.

It is accompanied with humiliation and a loss of self-esteem and enduring reproach. It is usually accompanied by ostracism.

The Israelites were circumcised at Gilgal. Circumcision was indicative of God rolling away their past. It was to give them a new beginning as they crossed over into the Promised Land. Their circumcision typified what baptism does for us as God takes away our sin. ***Colossians 2:9-12***

Israel's greatest struggle was overcoming the effects of Egyptian bondage. For the Israelites overcoming the lure of Egyptian bondage is like us overcoming the lure of sin. Bondage had destroyed their self-respect. They felt as though they didn't deserve anything better. We may think God want help us because we are less than perfect.

God's reward requires diligence not perfection. "It is no disgrace to Christianity . . . that its counsels of perfection have not made every single person perfect. Many seeking to come to Christ are trying to live good enough lives to deserve a better standing before God. They think they have to be good enough to deserve what God wants to give them.

The World's system is designed to only give us what we deserve, or to give us what it thinks we deserve, and if we are not careful the world will rob us of what it says we deserve.

To overcome the lure of bondage the world seeks to impose upon us we must understand who is the prince of this world—Satan.

He has reconstructed the thinking of this world in such a way to convince us that we are not deserving of divine grace—that we don't deserve anything better. He seeks to impose upon you the reproach of this world.

Satan seeks to rearrange our lives by implanting negative things in our minds about how we feel about ourselves. He reinforces those thoughts about ourselves by arranging situations in which we feel the rejection of others.

He brings negative things into you mind when you are trying to make progress in an attempt to keep you under the reproach of his system of things.

God is not out to give us what we deserve. He is seeking to give us what we don't deserve—divine forgiveness—as he rolls away the reproach of our sin and gives us this new identity in Christ.

LESSONS FROM BITTER EXPERIENCES

- Age Is Not an Excuse in Making Oneself Available
- Pain Is Inevitable in Life - ***Jere 15:18***
- We Must Embrace Endurance - ***Act 14:23***
- Go Through Healing Process - ***2 Chronicle 7:14***
- Painful Experience Equal Victory - ***Rom. 8:37***

CONCLUSION

Satan seeks to destroy our self-respect to convince us that we don't deserve anything better. Most of our problems in life stem from the way we feel about ourselves. Many times, we end up punishing ourselves through our misbehavior as a means to self-justification.