



The Almost Perfect Self-Portrait of Man

The Sad Truth We Too Often See in Ourselves
BUT There is Hope . . .

One of the most common “what ifs” of life is, “If only I could see myself as others see me or as I really am . . .” The *Bible* (in spite of what many think or are taught) is a very personal book; while it is a “macro” book (providing a broad view of life and civilizations), its primary purpose is to provide personal self-revelation – the stories, for example, are mainly given to provide us a picture of ourselves, our weaknesses/sin and need for God’s grace. There is no better example or picture of us, how we act and react in trials than by looking at our spiritual ancestors, the Jews. We either see their story as one of ancient history, not meaningful to today and us, or we see, in them, almost the perfect self-portrait of man, then and now.

In the 13th Chapter of *Exodus* we find the Jews leaving Egypt – it did not take long for the trials and failures to come. Very shortly after experiencing God’s deliverance from Egypt, Pharaoh catches up with them in the desert – would they depend of God and His grace or revert to trying to do the impossible themselves? Unfortunately:

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Ex 14:10 - 14

And true to Moses’ prophecy, God parted the Red Sea, the Jews walked across on dry land while the Egyptians, trying the same, were all drowned. Surely, now, the Jews would have faith in God, with the next trial we will see a better reaction!

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?” Ex 15:22 - 24

Being miraculously delivered from Egypt, seeing, for themselves, the Red Sea parting for their deliverance and the Egyptians' destruction, they fail again in three days! This is discouraging and inexplicable:

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, “If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.”

Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water. ^{Ex 15:25 - 27}

Now, for sure, they would have faith in God and His grace! Well, not exactly:

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD'S hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.” ^{Ex 16:1 - 4}

The LORD said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.” ^{Ex 16:11 - 15}

OK, God, in a short time, had shown His love, power and grace in several major ways – now, the Jews would certainly look to Him and His grace when facing a trial!

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?”

But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” ^{Ex 17:1 - 3}

God in His grace of patience does not smush the Jews like a bunch of insects:

The LORD answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim . . . He said, “For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.” ^{Ex 17:5 - 16}

God defeated their enemies. Now, for sure . . .

In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt . . .

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” Ex 19:1 - 8

Have they finally gotten it? Grace is available – but they had to exercise faith to get it.

“See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out.” Ex 23:20-23

When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.” Ex 31:18 - Ex 32:1

OK, the 1st year was not a good one, but maybe now . . .

On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the Testimony. Then the Israelites set out from the Desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran. Nu 10:11-12

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the LORD and the fire died down . . .

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!” Nu 11:1-6

Grumbling starts with the “rabble” and if left unchecked spreads:

Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. Nu 11:10

Well, they were coming to the edge of their reward – with all of God’s patience and provisions surely they could make the last few days, miles and trials by grace . . .

The LORD said to Moses, “Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.”

So at the LORD’S command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites . . .

They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. They gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.” Nu 13:1-27

They saw the blessing! God’s Word and Grace are true! Surely they could believe for the last few feet and days . . .

But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there . . .

Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” Nu 13:28-30

Thank God for a few good men! But often, even these, are no match to the unbelief of the crowd:

But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size.

We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt . . .”

“Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times—not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it . . . “

“How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: In this desert your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.’ Nu 13:31- 14:30

Then the people had a change of heart . . .

When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly. Early the next morning they went up toward the high hill country. “We have sinned,” they said. “We will go up to the place the LORD promised.”

But Moses said, “Why are you disobeying the LORD’S command? This will not succeed! Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, for the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword.”

Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD’S covenant moved from the camp. Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah. Nu 14:39-45

But it was too late for them! Time and grace were gone:

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.

Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses and said, “If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD? Why did you bring the LORD’S community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!”

Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. The LORD said to Moses, “Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.” Nu 20:1-8

When the Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that Israel was coming along the road to Atharim, he attacked the Israelites and captured some of them. Then Israel made this vow to the LORD? “If you will deliver these people into our hands, we will totally destroy their cities.” The LORD listened to Israel’s plea and gave the Canaanites over to them. They completely destroyed them and their towns; so the place was named Hormah.

They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”

Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. ^{Nu 21:1-9}

Then the Israelites traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho. ^{Nu 22:1}

While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD’S anger burned against them. ^{Nu 25:1-3}

The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything. ^{Dt 2:7}

Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ^{Dt 4:1}

Does this picture look familiar? everyone until and unless they re-emerges all too often). God we see with the Jews that which and teachers saying otherwise, the righteous do not live by the blessings rather:



It should because it is an excellent self-portrait of receive the grace of faith (and even then the old picture has prepared the way for faith by His many graces, but is true for ourselves: in spite of many “Christian” voices

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” ^{Ro 1:17}

But my righteous one will live by faith.
And if he shrinks back,
I will not be pleased with him.”

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved. ^{Heb 10:38-39}

The natural mind-set, a good self-portrait of man, is one who waits unprepared for trials, is surprised by them, shrinks back, murmurs, and complains to God and others about how bad we have it and finally is defeated and destroyed by the enemy. Faith, in contrast, is preparing and waiting for the next trial; being prepared to accept the graced offered – which is a difficult, but necessary, discipline if success is to be achieved.

It would be natural for someone to say, “I don’t understand – if grace is offered I would take it in a heartbeat!” But are we that interested in and fast to accept grace? Let’s look at an important, practical and easy to understand example. How do and should we “make a living” – providing food, clothing, shelter . . . for ourselves? Life and jobs have many difficulties and trials – how are we to face and overcome these trials – what is the right (by faith) approach? There is the natural approach and the

grace way – which do we expect to be most successful? – which are we following? Jesus, the Radical, provides His answer – He says:

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval. . . . The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”
Jn 6:27-29

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Mt 6:25-33

We even pray: “Give us this day our daily bread . . .” then, too often, go out and work like the devil to “earn” a living – grace/faith, in this instance, is absolutely incompatible with self-will and self-effort!

Jesus’ teachings and offer is a picture of grace – showing why faith is so necessary. Yes, grace is offered – we are presented with an offer of the gift of everything we need to live, but there is a condition – we must, instead of working for food to eat (clothes to wear, a house . . .), by faith, turn away from working for these things to do what God says is more important, seeking first His righteousness, and then this grace will be given to us. Do we earn it by seeking first . . .? No, but it is the condition for which we obtain the gift. Grace is a gift. Grace is powerful gift offer. But it can only be taken by faith – which invariably says: “I offer this gift, but to get it you must give up the ‘bird in the hand’ . . .” We have to decide if we believe God or the old adage “The bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”

The Jews had seen the miracles of God (as we surely have), but before the next trial (there is always a next trial coming) they failed to exercise the disciplines of faith, developing faith for the next trial. God will pass our valid tests – but we must expect trials (no, we seldom know what the trial will be, but we should know one is coming!) be in a state of readiness exercising the disciplines so it are prepared to accept His grace offered to those who, by faith can accept it.

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2Pe 3:17-18

So, the test of faith is not is grace available, but are we prepared and do we accept it. Faith, ahead of a trial, prepares us to accept the grace to successfully overcome the trial. This is only reasonable hope that we can:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds . . . Jas 1:2



Unless we are preparing for trials (through the disciplines of faith) we will be blind to the approaching dangers. Then, when they are at hand we will do all we (not Grace) can to meet and overcome them.

Trials are “pop quizzes” to test our faith – not God testing us, but for us to see (again) our need of His grace. This is almost a perfect self-portrait of man and the hope of grace!