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- Part: 50 [Listening to the Master](#)
- Part: 49 [Jesus the Evangelist](#)
- Part: 48 [Believers are Worshipers](#)
- Part: 47 [Are We Like the Woman at the Well?](#)
- Part: 46 [Snakes, Sinners and the Savior](#)
- Part: 45 [Starting Life Over Again](#)
- Part: 44 [What a Wonderful Change has been Wrought in Your Life](#)
- Part: 43 [DO YOU BELIEVE AND HAVE THIS LIFE?](#)
- Part: 42 [Triumphant Living](#)
- Part: 41 [Where Are You On The Spiritual Map of Your Life?](#)
- Part: 40 [Are You Enjoying an Endless, Overflowing, Victorious Life?](#)
- Part: 39 [How to Have the Endless Joy-Filled Life](#)
- Part: 38 [Jesus Is the Lamb of God?](#)
- Part: 37 [Jesus Is the Son of God](#)
- Part: 36 [Jesus in All the Gospels](#)
- Part: 35 [Hearing the Voice of Jesus](#)
- Part: 34 [ARE YOU READY TO](#)

## Jesus: I am the LIGHT in the Wildersness



Part 3 (010819PM)

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There they are, the three keys to walking in the Light:

1. We need to watch Jesus against the backdrop of the Divinely prescribed Worship of Israel, that is the 1<sup>st</sup> key to walking in the Light.
2. We need to see Jesus in the events of the Divinely appointed Feasts of Israel, that is the 2<sup>nd</sup> key to walking in the Light.
3. We need to follow Jesus the way He asked us to in this passage, that is the 3<sup>rd</sup> key to walking in the Light.

When Jesus walked into Jerusalem as the crowds swelled the city's population for the Feast of Tabernacles, He was planning on making His greatest offer to Israel in His ministry. To perhaps the largest crowd of all, this happy celebration drew faithful Jews from all over the Land and even the world. And here, at the great feast God had given to Moses to write 1,500 years earlier as a testimony of Christ, Jesus arrives and offers Himself to any and all who would listen.

Have you found Jesus as your light? Last time we studied what it meant to be trusting Jesus. This morning we need to study what it means to be following Jesus. To do so, join me again in the remarkable setting of this great I AM THE LIGHT declaration by Jesus. To do so we must ask the 1<sup>st</sup> Question. Okay, here we go. **Where was Jesus** when He declared He was the Light of the World? The answer? In the Courtyard of the Temple of Herod. What do we need to do? We need to watch Jesus against the backdrop of the Divinely prescribed Worship of Israel, that is the 1<sup>st</sup> key to walking in the Light.

To understand the magnitude of Christ's declaration that He was The Light of the World we need to turn back to the second book of the Bible. Remember when we studied Creation a while back? We saw that there are only two chapters [1] in the Bible are devoted to the creation story, whereas some fifty chapters focus on the Tabernacle (see especially Ex. 25-40). Why did God give so many details about the Divinely prescribed worship for Israel? Clearly the Tabernacle is important and demands attention in our study, because it is a giant portrait of Jesus Christ. **Everywhere you look in the Tabernacle you can see Jesus Christ the Lord!**

Walk again with me through Exodus 37-38 this morning. The courtyard of the Tabernacle was one hundred fifty feet long and seventy-five feet wide. As we walk around it on a Scriptural Tour we can find every object we see in some way points to Christ. And also His great I AM declarations are featured in this sacred place.

1. **Exodus 37:1-9 there was only one way to god.** Jesus reflected this when He declared I AM THE way, the truth, and the life. The only object <sup>[2]</sup> in the Holy of Holies was the **ark**, which represents Jesus Christ, the true **mercy seat**. When we meet Jesus Christ as Savior, we are ushered into the presence of God, into the true Holy of Holies. God no longer communes with men between the wings of cherubim on a gold mercy seat. He communes with men in His Son, by whom the veil was torn in two. Jesus Christ is the mercy seat. Only on the basis of the blood of a goat would God have fellowship with Israel, and only on the basis of the blood of Christ will God have fellowship with men. John, in using the term "propitiation," in **1 John 2:2**, relates Jesus to the mercy seat, since that very word *noip etsyalh* is used for mercy seat in the Septuagint translation of **Exodus 25:17**.
2. **Exodus 37:10-16 there was one source of food in the tabernacle of god's presence.** Jesus reflected this when He declared I AM the Bread of Life. On the right was the **table** on which was the **sacred bread**, or show-bread. This table, like the base of the altar, was of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It was three feet long, one and a half feet wide, and two and a quarter feet high. Every Sabbath twelve loaves of fresh bread were set on it, one for each of the twelve tribes. At the end of the week, the priests, and only the priests, were allowed to eat the loaves.

	STAND BEFORE CHRIST'S THRONE?
Part: 33	Do Troubles Push you Toward God?
Part: 32	Are You Pushed Toward God?
Part: 31	Is It Chastening or Pruning?
Part: 30	Our Father the VINEDRESSER
Part: 29	Fruit Bearing 101
Part: 28	Are You Cleansed, Clipped and Christ-like?
Part: 27	Secrets of Fruitfulness-2
Part: 26	Secrets of Fruitfulness-1
Part: 25	A Life Useful for Jesus
Part: 24	Starting Over in Newness in Jesus
Part: 23	Jesus: I Am the Vine
Part: 22	Secrets of the VINE
Part: 21	How to Get Christ's Well Done
Part: 20	How To Walk Through The Valley Of Death's Shadow
Part: 19	The Race and the Crown
Part: 18	Finishing Well With Christ's WELL DONE
Part: 17	I Go To Prepare a Place
Part: 16	In My Fathers House
Part: 15	Who is the LORD - Jehovah or Allah?
Part: 14	Are You Secure for Eternity?
Part: 13	Mormonism Is the Wrong Way to God
Part: 12	Are You Ready to Die?
Part: 11	Jesus: I AM the Resurrection and the Life
Part: 10	Is Your Cup Overflowing
Part: 9	Following Jesus as My Good Shepherd in the Hard Times of Life!
Part: 8	Is Your Head Oiled?
Part: 7	Following Jesus As My Good Shepherd
Part: 6	I AM THE DOOR: Entering Life Through Jesus
Part: 5	Have You Given Your Life to Jesus?
Part: 4	Jesus: I AM the Bread of Life
Part: 3	Jesus: I am the LIGHT in the Wilderness
Part: 2	Jesus: I AM the Light to follow
Part: 1	Jesus: I AM the Light to Trust

3. **Exodus 37:17-24** there was only one source of light in the tabernacle of god's presence. Jesus reflected this when He declared I AM the LIGHT of the world. Still moving west across the courtyard, we come to the Tabernacle proper-forty-five feet long, fifteen feet wide, and fifteen feet high. The **holy place** took up two-thirds of this area, which means that the **holy of holies** was a perfect fifteen-foot cube. Only priests could go into the Holy Place, in which were three pieces of furniture. On the left, as the priest entered, was a solid gold **lampstand** having seven branches, each filled with the purest olive oil.

4. **Exodus 37:25-28** there was one place of a constant offering rising to god from the tabernacle of god's presence. Jesus reflected this when He declared I AM THE VINE, and we are to abide in Him or we amount to nothing. Farther in and to the center of the Holy Place was the **altar of incense**. It, too, was of gold-overlaid acacia wood, one and one-half feet square and about three feet high. On this altar were placed the burning coals from the bronze altar in the courtyard, where sacrifice was made. The altar of incense pictures Jesus interceding for us, the perfect Sacrifice becoming the perfect Intercessor.

5. **Exodus 38:1-7** there was one sacrificial altar in the tabernacle of god's presence. Jesus reflected this when He declared I AM the Good Shepherd who gives MY LIFE for my sheep. So Jesus our Lamb offered Himself for us. The first article of furniture in the outer court was the bronze altar. It was made of acacia wood sheathed with bronze. It was seven and a half feet square, stood four and a half feet off the ground, and was topped with a bronze grate. The coals were placed underneath the grate and the sacrifice was placed on top. On the four corners of the altar were horns, to which the animal was bound when it was being sacrificed. **The bronze altar is again a perfect picture of Jesus Christ, who Himself was a sacrifice for sin.**

6. **Exodus 38:8** there was one place of cleansing in the tabernacle of god's presence. Jesus reflected this when He declared I AM the Resurrection and the Life, He shed His blood to cleanse us from our sins, we are washed in His blood. Once we have received forgiveness for our sins through Christ's sacrifice of Himself, we still need His daily cleansing that restores fellowship and joy. So the next piece of furniture in the court was the **laver** or basin, also made of bronze. In it the priests would wash their hands, and even sometimes their feet, as they went about the bloody services of sacrifice. **Here is a picture of Jesus Christ as the cleanser of His people.**

7. **Exodus 38:9-20** there was one entrance to the tabernacle of god's presence. Jesus reflected this when He declared I AM THE DOOR: There was only one entrance into God's earthly presence, a single gate, on the east side that was thirty feet wide and seven and a half feet high, allowing a large number of people to enter at the same time. It is a graphic picture of Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the way" and "I am the door." Just as there was only one entrance to the Tabernacle, there is only one way to God-the only Way and the only Door, Jesus Christ. Christianity is exclusive, not because Christians make it so but because God has made it so. Throughout the centuries, of course, Christians have made the earthly church exclusive in many wrong ways. But God has intentionally made His spiritual, eternal church exclusive. It can be entered only through Jesus Christ.

Now think over just exactly what it was that Jesus was saying. Remember, WHEN did He make this declaration? That makes all the difference to feel the magnitude of what He declared! It was after the entire nation had just relived for 14 days the great exodus deliverance and wilderness experience. And then after all that Christ was saying to all of them by association:

- I AM the pillar of fire that came between you and the Egyptians.
- I AM the cloud that guided you by day in the wilderness.
- I AM the pillar of fire that illumined the night.
- I AM the cloud that enveloped the Tabernacle.
- I AM the glorious cloud that filled Solomon's Temple at a Feast of Tabernacles 1000 years ago.
- I AM all of the great events you have been celebrating, the Light you seek - IT IS HERE, it is ME!"

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (**John 8:12**). He is everything suggested by the sublime metaphor of light — and much more.

1. The apostle John tells that Jesus went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles at the temple. In Jesus, God came in the flesh to celebrate with his people. On the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles, God incarnate stood in his temple calling out to his thirsty people to come to him and drink (**Jn 7:37**). **How ironic that his unrecognized voice was a disturbing presence in the festivities that had for so long been celebrated to welcome his presence!**

2. To be a follower of Christ is to give oneself body, soul and spirit into the obedience of the Master; and to enter upon that following is to walk in the light. We need the heavenly wisdom to walk the earthly way. The man who has a sure guide and an accurate map is the man who is bound to come in safety to his journey's end. Jesus Christ is that guide; he alone possesses the map to life. To follow Jesus is to walk in His light safely through life and afterwards to enter into glory.

**The Feast of Sukkot** During Old Testament <sup>[3]</sup> times, God instituted a religious calendar for the Israelites to follow. The seventh day, the seventh year, and the end of seven "seven years" were significant to Him. Within each year, there were seven specified feasts (Leviticus 23), which included the Feast of Sukkot (or Tabernacles).

1. The weeklong celebration of Sukkot began after the fall harvest, a time to be especially thankful for God's blessings. Following God's command, the people came to Jerusalem and built booths of olive, palm, and myrtle branches (**Nehemiah 8:15**), which provided shade.

2. The people were to leave enough space in the branches so that they could see the sky, reminding them of their wilderness years. These booth (*sukkot*; plural:

sukkah) gave the feast its name.

3. For seven days, the people ate, lived, and slept in these booths. It was a time to praise God for His past gifts of freedom, land, and bountiful harvests. In fact, God commanded them to "rejoice" before Him ([Leviticus 23:40](#)).

4. A special element of the celebration of Sukkot involved living water. Sukkot took place at the end of the dry season, so the rains needed to begin immediately to ensure a bountiful harvest the following year. Thus the celebration of God's harvest was coupled with the people's fervent prayers for the next year's rains. The priests, too, added a ceremony that included a prayer for rain. During this ceremony, a procession of priests marched from the temple to the Pool of Siloam, which was fed by the Spring of Gihon. One priest filled a golden pitcher with water, and the procession returned to the temple. At that time, the priest carrying the pitcher stood near the top of the altar and solemnly poured the water into one of two silver funnels leading into the stone altar for the daily drink offerings. At this time, the people accompanied by the Levitical choir began a chant that meant, "O Lord, save us by sending rain as well." In this way, they asked God for life-giving rain. Four great menorahs (more than seventy-five feet high) were also placed in the women's court of the temple. They commemorated the miraculous burning of the Holy of Holies after Judah Maccabee defeated the Greek army of Antiochus and reclaimed Jerusalem.

In the context of Sukkot, the water ceremony, and the menorahs blazing with light, Jesus presented the message of His new kingdom. He had traveled to Jerusalem for Sukkot ([John 7:10](#)) and had taught great crowds thronging the temple ([John 7:14](#)). On the "last and greatest day of the Feast" ([John 7:37](#)), during the water ceremony, the chanted prayers, and the plea made through the offering of living water, Jesus stood and said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" ([John 7:37-38](#)). So, the setting in which Jesus chose to give this lesson, and the similarity of His meaning to Jewish tradition, meant that His shouted promise in the temple must have had stunning impact: "Let him come to Me!". Sukkot is a feast that will be fully realized in heaven. There, God's people will experience living water ([Revelation 7:17](#)), His eternal presence ([Revelation 21:22](#)), and the light of God ([Revelation 22:5](#)). Whereas Sukkot taught the Jewish people to be joyful, in anticipation of heaven, imagine the most joyful celebration that ever existed lasting for eternity. That, indeed, is heaven!

1. **Jesus: The light that reminds us of our frailty.** Not only did the temporary booths symbolize the tents in which the Israelites lived while they were divinely protected by God in the desert, but they also represented mankind's earthly bodies, temporary dwelling places for our eternal souls and spirits.

2. **The feast of tabernacles speaks of Christ's birth.** Most of the Jews who made their way to Jerusalem during the time of the second Temple had no idea that God Himself had just tabernacled Himself among them. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, had stepped into a temporary tabernacle of flesh in order to bring all men to Himself. The apostle John tells us, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" ([John 1:14](#) NKJV). Writing to a primarily Jewish audience, John used the Greek word *skēnos* (shelter or covering) and the metaphor of a tabernacle to describe Christ's incarnation. The same word appears in [Revelation 21:3](#), when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven and God says, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with (men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."

Many Bible scholars, and I count myself as one of the believe that Jesus was born during the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

1. It is a fact that it's not logical that shepherds would be outside during the month of December-the flocks were brought in to warm, sheltering caves as soon as the fall harvest was completed.

2. There are other indications that Jesus was born on the Feast of Tabernacles. Look at [Luke 2:10](#). The angel appeared to the shepherds and said: "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."

- The phrase "great joy" would have been automatically associated with Sukkot, for it was known as the *Season of Our Joy*.
- Likewise, the phrase "to all people" would remind the Jewish hearer that Sukkot was also known as the Feast of the Nations. Two strong themes of Sukkot in one short message!

3. Another clue that points to a Sukkot nativity is the fact that Bethlehem was so crowded there was "no room in the inn." Luke explained the crowded conditions by saying that every family had gone to their home city to be taxed, but the Romans were nothing if not logical. If you wanted to gather taxes, would you do it in the dead of winter or right after the harvest, the farmer's "payday"? Because Bethlehem is less than four miles from Jerusalem, it is logical that the little city would be crowded with pilgrims on their way to the Temple to celebrate Sukkot.

4. Finally, since Jesus' ministry on the cross was so vividly portrayed by the rituals surrounding Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First fruits, isn't it reasonable to assume that the Feast of Tabernacles illustrates His birth? The apostle John certainly thought so, for he didn't hesitate to evoke images of tabernacles to explain Christ's incarnation.

5. **The feast of tabernacles proclaims Christ as our salvation.** There's one other image from the Temple celebration of Sukkot that I'd like you to see. To commemorate the drawing of water from the rock at Horeb ([Ex. 17:1-7](#)), on the morning of the first day of the festival and every day thereafter, a priest carried a large golden ewer from the Temple mount down to the spring of Siloam. Surrounded by jubilant worshippers, he drew water from the pool, then returned to the Temple, walking through the water gate, which led to the inner court. A great cheering crowd waited for him near the altar. Priests blew the ceremonial silver trumpets, and other

priests chanted the words of Isaiah: "Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation" (12:3 NKJV). Don't miss the 'hÖyvW;[hsignificance, my friend- "salvation" in Hebrew is *yeshua*, the same word we translate "Jesus."

On the first through the sixth days, the priest and his joyful processional circled the altar once, but on the seventh day they circled the altar seven times! The highlight of the ceremony occurred when the priest stood and poured the water on the altar. While the water washed away the blood of the morning's sacrifices, a long line of priests, all bearing willow branches, sang psalms of praise.

The water ritual, known as *Simcha Bet Ha-sho-evah* (the Rejoicing of the House of Drawing Water) prophetically illustrates:

- the time when the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon Israel.
- It also illustrates the truth that Jesus Christ, the Giver of living water, came to earth at Sukkot.

Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water. . .Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:10, 13-14 NKJV).

Like all devout Jewish men, Jesus attended the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. On the last day of one Sukkot festival, He stood and cried out to the crowd: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38 NKJV). The apostle John goes on to explain that Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit, which had not yet been given.

Can't you just see it? Jesus and His disciples had just attended the glorious celebration inside the Temple. They had sung psalms with the priests, had perhaps followed the golden ewer of water seven times around the altar. They watched the liquid stream over the altar, cleaning away the blood of goats and rams from the morning sacrifices. As the rustlings of a thousand palms filled the air, foreshadowing the palms that would be lifted to hail Him when He would enter Jerusalem to die at Passover, Jesus spoke in a commanding voice and explained the ritual the Jews had just witnessed.

He was the Light of the World, the Living Water, the Word made flesh to dwell among them. He would soon be the Passover Lamb, the Bread Without Leaven, the First fruits. As our sinless High Priest, He would atone for sin once and for all. Hundreds in the Temple that day heard Him ...but only those with understanding believed. Do you? ***For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, And floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, And My blessing on your offspring. - Isaiah 44:3 NKJV***

**The references in John 7:37** We can now in some measure realize the event recorded in John 7:37. The festivities of the Week of Tabernacles were drawing to a close. "It was the last day, that great day of the feast." It was on that day, after the priest had returned from Siloam with his golden pitcher, and for the last time poured its contents to the base of the altar; after the "Hallel" had been sung to the sound of the flute, the people responding and worshipping as the priests three times drew the threefold blasts from their silver trumpets just when the interest of the people had been raised to its highest pitch, that, from amidst the mass of worshipers, who were waving towards the altar quite a forest of leafy branches as the last words of Psalm 118 were chanted **a voice was raised which resounded through the Temple**, startled the multitude, and carried fear and hatred to the hearts of their leaders. It was Jesus, who "stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." Then by faith in Him should each one truly become like the Pool of Siloam, and from his inmost being "rivers of living waters flow" (John 7:38). "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive." Thus the significance of the rite, in which they had just taken part, was not only fully explained, but the mode of its fulfillment pointed out.

The effect was instantaneous.

- It could not but be, that in that vast assembly, so suddenly roused by being brought face to face with Him in whom every type and prophecy is fulfilled, there would be many who, "when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet.
- Others said, This is the Christ."
- Even the Temple-guard, whose duty it would have been in such circumstances to arrest one who had so interrupted the services of the day, and presented himself to the people in such a light, owned the spell of His words, and dared not to lay hands on Him. "Never man spake like this man", was the only account they could give of their unusual weakness, in answer to the reproaches of the chief priests and Pharisees.
- The rebuke of the Jewish authorities, which followed, is too characteristic to require comment. One only of their number had been deeply moved by the scene just witnessed in the Temple. Yet, timid as usually, Nicodemus only laid hold of this one point, that the Pharisees had traced the popular confession of Jesus to their ignorance of the law, to which he replied, in the genuine Rabbinical manner of arguing, without meeting ones opponent face to face: "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?"

The Bible speaks often of the glory of God—the visible appearance of His beauty and perfection reduced to blazing light.

- His glory appeared to Moses in a burning bush in Midian (Ex. 3:1-6),
- in a cloud on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:15-17),
- and in a rock on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 33:18-23).
- The glory of God also filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34),
- led the people as a pillar of fire and cloud (Ex. 40:35-38),
- and also filled the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kin. 8:10, 11).
- When Aaron made the first sacrifice in the wilderness (Lev. 9:23-24), as a priest, the "glory of the Lord appeared to all the people."

In these manifestations, God was revealing His righteousness, holiness, truth,

wisdom, and grace—the sum of all He is. **However, nowhere has God’s glory been more perfectly expressed than in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:14).** It will be seen on earth again when He returns (Matt. 24:29–31; 25:31). [4]

Our Lord’s I AM statement was also related to the Feast of Tabernacles, during which the huge candelabra were lighted in the temple at night to remind the people of the pillar of fire that had guided Israel in their wilderness journey. **In fact, John has combined three “wilderness images”: the manna (John 6), the water from the rock (John 7), and the pillar of fire (John 8).** To “follow” the Lord Jesus means to believe on Him, to trust Him; and the results are *life and light for the believer*. The unsaved are walking in darkness because they love darkness (John 3:17ff). One of the major messages in this Gospel is that the spiritual light is now shining, but people cannot comprehend it—and they try to put it out (John 1:4–5) [5]

**Jesus the light that Protects us:** Psalm 105:39-41 He spread a cloud for a covering, And fire to give light in the night. 40 The people asked, and He brought quail, *And satisfied them with the bread of heaven.* 41 *He opened the rock, and water gushed out; It ran in the dry places like a river.*

**Jesus the light that comforts us:** Psalm 105:39-41 He spread a cloud for a covering, **And fire to give light in the night.** 40 The people asked, and He brought quail, *And satisfied them with the bread of heaven.* 41 *He opened the rock, and water gushed out; It ran in the dry places like a river.*

**Jesus the light that Provides for us:** Psalm 105:39-41 He spread a cloud for a covering, And fire to give light in the night. 40 The people asked, and He brought quail, *And satisfied them with the bread of heaven.* 41 *He opened the rock, and water gushed out; It ran in the dry places like a river.*

**Jesus: The light that guides us.** “By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night” Exodus 13:21 *who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day.* Deuteronomy 1:33

**And then the most stupendous thing happened as they entered the wilderness—an immense pillar of cloud formed in the sky before them to lead the way.** At sunset it became a pillar of fire, so that every night Israel was lighted by its swirling orange glow (13:20–22). What a spectacle that must have been against the backdrop of the star-studded desert sky. Wild exaltation gripped the people. What a fabulous beginning! What hopes! What dreams! Soon they would be in the Promised Land, bury Joseph’s bones, and there forever enter their rest.

**Jesus: The light that warns us.** It all began so well—but ended so poorly. **It is not how you start, but how you finish!** Of the 600,000 men (the million-plus Israelites who began so well), only two over the age of twenty ever got to the Promised Land—and that was forty years later. The rest fell, disappointed corpses in the desert. **The grand and terrible lesson of Israel’s history is that it is possible to begin well and end poorly.** In fact, this tragic human tendency dominates much human spiritual experience. [6]

**Jesus: The light that refines us.** Fire is a symbol of God’s presence throughout the Bible, beginning with Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:2–4) and continuing with the consuming fire on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:17). The fire at Pentecost indicated God’s presence, just as its resting on Israel demonstrated a corporate unity. However, a new significance came when the fire divided into flames dancing over the individual apostles. The Spirit now rests upon each believer individually. The emphasis from Pentecost onwards is on the personal relationship of God to the believer through the Holy Spirit. **The inner pillar of fire burns away our dross, flames forth from our inner being, and brings to us a sense of God’s presence and power.** The fire of God! [7]

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[1] Drawn from MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

[2] All of this material on the Tabernacle adapted and quoted from MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Hebrews*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983.

[3] Ray Vander Laan, *Faith Lessons On The Life & Ministry Of The Messiah. Leader’s Guide*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999, p. 318-20.

[4] John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing) 1997.

[5] Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

[6] Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Hebrews Vol 1&2—An Anchor for the Soul*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1993.

[7] Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Acts—The Church Afire*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1996.

