Chapter One

The Undiscovered Country

I admit it. I’m a Star Trek fan. A closet “Trekkie.” I’m sure it has to do with the fact that as a boy, I dreamed of becoming an astronaut. The U.S. space program was about to put a man on the moon and I was caught up in the heady exuberance of discovery that has pushed people of all ages to leave familiar shores for new frontiers.

That sense of wonder was captured in the opening monologue of each Star Trek episode: “Our five-year mission - to explore strange new worlds; to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before!”

The real space men - the Apollo astronauts - were living out this fictional creed. They were to walk where no one had ever walked before. Theirs was to be an experience unshared by all but a few members of the human race. They were to see what no human eyes had seen; to hear what no other human ears had heard; to feel what had only been imagined in the minds of scientists, novelists, and pilots. These “Magellans of the late twentieth century” were to set foot, not on the distant shores of a new continent, but on the strange soil of another world!

First came Armstrong. His ghostly form lumbered down the stairs of his spider-like spacecraft, ironically named “Eagle,” before his dramatic “leap for mankind” to the dusty lunar surface. I, like so many millions of others, was glued to the TV watching history unfold. What was it like to be 200,000 miles from home, watching not sun or moon, but earth - your earth - rise? Hear the words of General Charles Duke, pilot of Apollo 16, and one of only twelve men to walk on the moon.

None of us in the astronaut program volunteered for fame or fortune. If everybody was like me they volunteered for the thrill of adventure and sense of exploration. To see what it was like out there with your own eyes and your own feelings. It was just tremendously exciting to stand on the moon. I cant even put it into words the excitement I experienced as I stood there looking across this dramatic landscape which was absolutely lifeless. We just felt like we were supposed to be there. We did not feel like we were intruders in this foreign land.

The men of Apollo were visitors to an undiscovered country.
The western frontier

A hundred and twenty years before Armstrong’s leap scratched America’s itch to conquer the moon, the thrill of discovery, and the promise of wealth, was beckoning men west. Again, the bold and the brave risked all to follow the Oregon Trail to the sea. In the early 1840s, the West was the new frontier and the desire to get there drove a nation.

“Where did you go? West. Why? Just because. Magic. A thing of the spirit. “2 Adding to the lore of the times, Henry David Thoreau spoke of the beckoning Shangri-La in glowing terms. “The heavens of America appear infinitely higher, the sky is bluer, the air is fresher, the cold is intenser, the moon looks larger, die stars are brighter, the thunder is louder, the lightning is vivider, the wind is stronger, the rain is heavier, the mountains are higher, the rivers longer, the forests bigger, the plain broader…”

“Will not man,” Thoreau then asked, “grow to greater perfection intellectually as well as physically under these influences?“3

“Magic.” “A thing of the spirit.” Man achieving “greater perfection.” These were the engines that drove the northwestern explorers to pursue their undiscovered country.

The Promised Land

Another time. Another place. Some three thousand years prior to the expeditions of Lewis and Clark, another scouting party was just coming back from a reconnaissance mission into the “undiscovered country” of Canaan. Twelve men from the tribes of Israel were chosen to explore this land of “milk and honey” God had promised to the descendants of Abraham nearly 700 years earlier.

The spies couldn’t believe their eyes. For men who had only known the sting of the lash and the blood-stained mud of the Egyptian brick pits, the first glimpse of the Promised Land must have been breathtaking. The Bible records their early findings.

“When they reached the Valley of Eshcol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs” (Numbers 13:23, NIV).

Imagine grapes the size of cantaloupes! So heavy were these grapes that instead of carrying a cluster in one hand, it took two men to haul them away strapped to a plank. The land was rich and fertile, and abundant. And it was theirs for the taking. God had already promised it
to them. But strange as it seems, some people had a hard time believing the promise.

“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’” (Numbers 13:26, 27, NIV).

So far so good. If only they would have stopped there and possessed the promise! Yet something is amiss. The body language is wrong. Instead of bold confidence, there’s a sag in the shoulders and you can hear the “but” that is sure to follow.

“‘But…’” (Here it comes), “‘the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large’” (v. 28).

What’s that noise? Sounds like knee caps banging together. Ah, but look. Not everyone’s knees were knocking. Caleb, one of the twelve spies, tried to get the eyes of the crowd back where they belonged - on the God of the Exodus, the God who had brought them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and out of bondage with a “strong hand.”

“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’” (v. 30).

Within Caleb’s chest beat a pioneer’s heart. He, like Magellan, Lewis and Clark and Armstrong who would follow in future generations, wanted to possess the “undiscovered country.” He was driven by a vision of a better life and by a belief in a God who so completely believed in him. Unfortunately, not everyone had “the right stuff.”

“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” (v. 31-14:1).

The record of what happened next is a sad chronicle of what happens when faith dies. When the thirsty traveler dies within sight of a well. When the marathon runner collapses a few yards from the finish.
line. When the gambler sells the winning lottery ticket to a friend hours before the winning numbers are announced. So close…

The liberated sons and daughters of God, so recently rescued from the taskmaster’s whip, cried out for the “security” of Egyptian slavery rather than put their trust in the promises of the God who swallowed Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea. Things may not have been great in Egypt, but at least they knew what to expect. Canaan was virgin territory - something altogether new. Their faith faltered and they lost it all.

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?… 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’ (Numbers 14:11,21-23).

The newly-freed slaves were turned away from the borders of the Promised Land and sentenced to wander in the desert for forty years - a year for each day the spies had explored the “undiscovered country” without possessing it!

Please note that they explored, sampled, walked through, investigated, observed, and gathered data on the Promised Land, but failed to possess it. They did not plant their flag on its soil. They did not go up and settle in.

For those twenty years old or more, their eyes would never see the land flowing with milk and honey. Their feet would never trod on its fertile soil. Their bodies would never find rest in the shade of Canaan’s lush vineyards. Instead, their sun-scorched eyes and sand-blistered feet would know only the heat, monotony, and barrenness of the Judean wilderness. Until at last, their carcasses would fall in the desert; a mute testimony to the tragic consequences of unbelief and lack of vision.

The realm of the Spirit

In the sixth Star Trek film, the “undiscovered country” refers not to a place, but to a time. Specifically, the future. A future where old enemies lay down their weapons along with their hatred. A future filled with the hope and promise of peace - a dream as yet, unrealized, but within the grasp of those brave enough to pursue it.
For you and for me, our “undiscovered country” also refers to a time and an experience. The experience is personal and corporate spiritual revival. A return to our first love with Jesus, a rekindled hunger and thirst for the things of God, for communion with Him through His Word, worship, and prayer. A reawakened sense of urgency regarding our Lord’s soon return and our loved one’s readiness to meet Him. A renewal of child-like trust in the power, providence, and promises of God that results in a return of the Holy Spirit in all His Christ-uplifting, life-changing, miracle-working glory to the church. The experience is Pentecost II. The time is the time of the latter rain - and that time could be now.

Please don’t tune me out. I want to speak from my heart here. (If we were sitting across the kitchen table from each other, I’d lower my voice to get your full attention.) Don’t let the term “Pentecost” cause your deodorant to fail. We’ve been afraid of the Holy Spirit too long. Too easily scared off by images of people rolling on the floor, shaking uncontrollably, and babbling unintelligible sounds. We’ve associated the experience of the Holy Spirit with the excesses of emotionalism for so long, that we’ve fled in the opposite direction and settled for the theoretical knowledge of the Holy Spirit instead.

Bible scholar Gordon Fee states, “The element of spirituality lacking in the contemporary church is the realization that heaven (not as a place but as a promised time) has come to earth in the person of the Spirit. Because of this ‘Spirit invasion,’ the church should be living out a heavenly life in the here and now. The church of today, however, has bought into the culture’s values, which has blurred our understanding of what Paul says about the Holy Spirit.”

“Blurred understanding” is putting it mildly for some of us. We’ve all but tamed the Spirit and capped the wells of salvation that would abundantly supply the water of life our thirsty souls crave. A few years back, a woman writing a letter to the editor of the Adventist Review lamented this lack of vision among us. “I’m afraid,” she wrote, “we got lost somewhere on our way from Egypt to Canaan and we’ve been just wandering in circles in the desert.”

Like the children of Israel before us, we have explored, sampled, walked through, investigated, observed, and gathered data on revival. But we’ve failed to possess the promise! Consequently, we remain restless wanderers in a desert of dry formalism and monotonous orthodoxy. Our bloated carcasses don’t litter a Judean wilderness today.
Instead, they waste away on the pews of churches that are often as devoid of the power of God as a tomb is devoid of life!

May I get personal here and speak freely? I want to ask some penetrating questions and I want you to take some time and really think about your answers. What is life like for you in Los Angeles, California; or Vancouver, Washington; or Augusta, Georgia; or Sand Point, Idaho or White Plains; New York, or wherever you call home? What is it like to be in your skin today? What is the condition of your relationships? Your marriage? How are you getting along with your children? How’s your health? What is the atmosphere of your home? When was the last time you read the Bible with relish? When was the last time you felt your heart burning within you as you listened to the Word of God preached? How is your relationship with God?

Your career. Is it all you hoped it would be? Your possessions. Your home, cars, clothes, computer or stereo equipment, etc. Are they providing a sense of personal delight and spiritual fulfillment? Your pace of life. Is it rational, balanced, and sane, or has it become a vicious taskmaster that drains the life force from your body leaving you empty?

What is it like to be you tonight? What has your faith become? Is it vibrant, growing? Are you getting deeper with God? Less superficial? Or has growth stopped? Have you lost your first love? Has habit replaced passion? Duty substituted for delight? Routine replaced romance?

While I was typing these words on my laptop computer, the phone rang. The voice belonged to a friend of mine from Los Angeles. She sounded tense and when I asked how she was doing, she replied, “A D-minus.” When I probed further, she said nothing in her life was going right. “I’ve gotten far away from God and I can feel the results of my distance. I have hatred towards those I work with, I’ve fallen into destructive health habits, and I’ve been crying my eyes out. I want to get close to Him again.”

I don’t know where this book finds you today, but God wants to take you to a better place. He wants to embrace you in His arms and restore your soul. He wants you to know that He’s real and can give you renewed purpose and joy beyond measure. Will you go with Him?

You know what? There are some things I’m tired of reading about. Some things I don’t care to hear second hand. During the Atlanta Olympics, I enjoyed watching the Americans win the gold. I read the recap of the previous day’s heroics with relish. For two weeks, I lived vicariously through the “Dream Team,” the “Magnificent Seven,” and
all the other outstanding young men and women who had dedicated their lives to being the best in the world.

I know I’ll never be an Olympian. In the arena of world-class sports, I’m content to watch others excel from the sidelines of my living room. But the manifest glory of God is something altogether different. I want a part of that action. I’m not content to merely read about the miracles happening in other people’s lives. I’m not satisfied with hearing reports of what the Holy Spirit is doing in eastern Europe, or Russia, or Tanzania. I want to see God at work in my life, in my marriage, on my job, in the lives of my children, and in my nation. This is one time I’m not content to watch from the sidelines!

You and I must pursue, and possess the “undiscovered country” of revival. And we will possess “the land” by prayer, persistence, and promise.

Listen to what God says you and I can have:

” No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit” (I Corinthians 2:9, 10, emphasis added).

Did you see that? Ours is to be an experience unparalleled in the history of earth. Our eyes are to see what no human eyes have seen; Our ears are to hear what no human ears have heard; We’re to experience what hasn’t even been imagined in the minds of this world’s most brilliant scientists, novelists, or politicians. You and I are the spiritual Magellans of the twenty-first century, with a destination that’s not on the distant shores of a new continent but within the veil of the Holy of Holies!

The latter rain has been looked forward to as some great future event. As it applies to the church at large, this may be true. But I believe it is our privilege to ask God for the fullness of His Spirit now. We may possess Jesus, the sweet evidence of pardoned sin and the assurance of salvation, power for witnessing, and intimacy with the Almighty right now!

The final outpouring may still be future. We can and must seek God for it. But a storm is first preceded by scattered showers, and those early drops can fall on you and me. We’ve been praying for rain, now it’s time we bought galoshes.

There is a land yet undiscovered in its fullness, not because it is hidden but because some have stopped looking. Many have found it, but many more must begin the journey to the undiscovered realm of the Spirit. As with the explorers and pioneers of the past, our journey
will require courage, vision, determination and fearlessness. But the rewards will be amazing.

The phrase is well worn, but true just the same. The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The first step is to verbalize our heart’s desire - to say, “Bring back the glory, Lord! Bring back the glory of who You are and who You created me to be. Bring back Your glory to my prayer life, my witness, to my relationships and to my walk with You!”

And now, are you ready for God’s answer? Do you want to know what happens when God’s people pray for revival? Can you stand to be blessed? In the words of Caleb, lets “go up and take possession of the [promise], for we can certainly do it.”

3. Ibid.