

PROVIDING, TESTING, AND RESTING

Exodus series pt 9: Chapters 15-16
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 10/1/23, Matt Heerema

Please open your Bibles to Exodus 15.

The last few weeks we have been studying God's powerful deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. Last week we looked at how God miraculously defeated the Egyptian army, and led them to safety through the parted waters of the Red Sea, and they celebrated their rescue mightly and created a magnificent song that they sang! When we left off, these were the words ringing in the air.

Exodus 15:21 (CSB)

Miriam sang to them: Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted; he has thrown the horse and its rider into the sea.

In today's passage we are now past that miraculous and are off on the journey that takes up the rest of Exodus: the journey through the desert wilderness to the promised land. The celebration quiets down. The slog begins.

And they made it three whole days before they lose their faith, and start complaining.

Exodus 15:22-24(CSB)

Then Moses led Israel on from the Red Sea, and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur.

They journeyed for three days in the wilderness without finding water. They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water at Marah because it was bitter—that is why it was named Marah. The people grumbled to Moses, "What are we going to drink?"

Three days. After generations of slavery at the hands of the Egyptians, and a powerful and miraculous series of events to rescue them, 10 supernatural plagues, the rescue of their firstborn from the angel of death, the parting of a sea, the crushing of an army, a pillar of cloud and fire (which by the way is still leading them) – three days later and it's "yeah, but what have you done for me lately??"

Israel has a complaining problem. But the complaining problem reveals a faith problem. One we all share with them.

In our passage today we get to see that in order to address that faith problem God reveals himself to them, so that they can come to know him and trust him. Today we'll see that God reveals himself as:

- God the provider
- God the healer
- God the test giver
- God the rest giver

And as God shows himself to us as these things, we learn about who we are by stark contrast.

[READ: Exodus 15:24-16:36 (CSB)]

GOD THE PROVIDER

Today we get to see God responding to the complaints of grumbling Israel in a way that shows us who he is.

Complaint: Water

Israel brings up two legitimate needs. In the first one, "what are we going to drink", they have a point: there are several million people leaving Egypt in this Exodus, and they have been without a water source for three days, apparently their supplies are now empty, and they do finally find a place to drink and water their livestock, and the water is undrinkable. Not just that it tastes nasty, but for whatever reason, it is unusable.

God's answer: a miracle. He shows Moses a tree to throw into the water, which miraculously makes it clean. One commentator observes that God seems to have a thing for healing with trees. The tree of life in the Garden of Eden, this tree purifying the water, the tree of life for the healing of the nations in Revelation, and Jesus hanging on the tree of the cross to heal all God's people of their greatest sickness: sin.

God provides water in response to Israel's grumbling.

Complaint: Food

Just a month and a half later, the second complaint comes "you brought us out here to die of hunger!" shows a little bit more where their soul is: not just wondering how they are going to get food, but accusing God of being out to get them, wanting them to die of hunger.

The complaint goes deep. Rewriting history and how things actually were in Egypt. “Remember the good old days in Egypt?? Everything was great then! An all-you-can-eat buffet!”

They didn’t exactly have the facts right here either. They had a whole bunch of livestock with them. They would have had milk and cheese, and could have eaten the meat if they needed to. They weren’t in actual danger of starvation.

They were right that they needed food and water. Their problem is their lack of faith that God who had performed miracles to rescue them from slavery didn’t know and didn’t care about their situation, leading to the fear and grumbling we witness here.

What would your answer be to this lack of gratitude, this lack of trust, and this accusation that you were out to get them? What is God’s answer? One of the central miracles of the Old Testament. One that Israel would remember in memory and song for the rest of its history: a feast of quail, which was an Egyptian delicacy, followed by starting a new promise of daily giving them the bread of life: manna.

In response to Israel’s grumbling, God shows himself to be *Yahweh Jira*, God the Provider.

GOD THE HEALER

The accusation that God brought them out to the wilderness to starve them to death is particularly bad, because God had already promised them that He is *Yahweh Rophe*: God the Healer.

Exodus 15:26 (CSB)

He said, “If you will carefully obey the Lord your God, do what is right in his sight, pay attention to his commands, and keep all his statutes, I will not inflict any illnesses on you that I inflicted on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you.”

He is telling us that his disposition toward his people is one of mercy, and good intent. He is not out to get us. He is not here to plague us, he is here to help us out of our diseases and ailments.

It is important to understand that he is not promising here to release us immediately from everything that is bothering us. He is promising something much bigger, and much better than that. He is promising to use all our trials, all our tests in life, to heal us of our ultimate problem in this life: our unbelief. He is proving himself to us by showing us who he is, and who we are. And he’s doing so by way of testing.

GOD THE TEST GIVER

We'll see this in the coming chapters of Exodus, but here he reveals himself as a test-giver.

Exodus 16:4 (CSB)

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. This way I will test them to see whether or not they will follow my instructions.

Here's what that means. Don't think of this as God baiting us to set us up to see if we will succeed or fail. That would be God tempting us, and the book of James tells us that God does not tempt anyone. An older word for testing is "proving" and in older translations the word in verse 4 is "I will prove them" – in other words, God is showing us what we are made of. He's not finding out something he doesn't know, he is revealing something so that it can be seen by all.

I see four small tests God gives the people, and they fail at each of these.

- **Instructions: "Gather two quarts per person"**

- Response: some gathered a lot, some gathered a little
- Result: each was left with only what they needed (wasted effort...)

- **Instructions: "Don't leave any till morning"**

- Response: some tried to pile it up:
- Result: Found it rotten and full of worms

- **Instructions: Take twice as much on the 6th day:**

- Response: No problem. They did this.
- Result: It was fine the next day!

- **Instructions: "Don't gather on the 7th day"**

- Response: Some went out anyway
- Result: Found nothing. Missed rest.

In these four small tests, God is showing us something. Jesus put it this way:

Luke 16:10 (CSB)

Whoever is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and whoever is unrighteous in very little is also unrighteous in much.

God is *testing* Israel, *proving* to them that they have a problem. Faithlessness. He is giving them the diagnosis to their core problem, the true sickness that is ultimately the thing we need healed: unbelief, lack of trust evidenced by lack of obedience.

And God put in place a daily and weekly rhythm, which it seems they actually learn to follow, of gathering their *daily bread*, no more, no less, and trusting that the sabbath *doesn't* require work and the rest can be had, and they will still be provided for. 40 years of daily practicing this rhythm that confronts their need for faith and trust in a provider.

So we have God the provider, consistently giving his people everything they need: life, rescue, water, food, and the consistent response is lack of gratitude, and complaining. We have God the healer, setting out to cure our ultimate disease. We have God the test-giver, bringing situations into our life to show us our need for that healing. But God isn't constantly putting us through the paces, God knows all our needs, and God knows that part of our healing involves a need for rest.

GOD THE REST-GIVER

We see two times God gives his people rest in this passage.

The oasis at Elim: First we see that God rescues his people from Egypt and just a few days later takes them to Elim where they stay put for a month and a half, resting by plenty of water, and plenty of shade and fruit. A time probably to recover from the dramatic events they just went through. A time to rest under the pillar of cloud and fire's watchful protection. A time to reflect. God knows that we need seasons of rest, and he mercifully gives them to us.

The Sabbath: The second place we see God as rest-giver in this passage is in setting up the Sabbath. A weekly break from work. Part of the test with the manna is giving them time off from the work of gathering food! Today is a day to not work, not worry, simply enjoy God the provider of two days of manna. God the healer of our souls.

The Promised Land: The very journey they are on is to a promised land where they will finally be at home and at rest.

The Christ: But most notably, behind the bread from heaven, and in the Sabbath rhythm of rest, and foreshadowed by the promised land is The Messiah, the Christ, Jesus.

CHRIST, OUR SABBATH REST AND THE BREAD OF LIFE

All of these things that God is revealing about himself are only truly fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.

Hebrews tells us that Israel never truly found the rest they were looking for, because they were meant to find it in Christ. Jesus himself said “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” (Matthew 12:8 CSB)

And today we are going to celebrate communion together, the Lord’s supper. Where we are reminded that the food we eat from day to day will always cause us to be hungry and grumbly again. And the water we drink will dry up and leave us thirsty and complaining again.

If we let them, our physical needs can lead us to recognize our spiritual need. Jesus told the crowds to come to him if they recognize their spiritual hunger and their spiritual thirst.

John 6:32-35 (CSB)

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, Moses didn’t give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Then they said, “Sir, give us this bread always.” “I am the bread of life,” Jesus told them. “No one who comes to me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in me will ever be thirsty again.

Out of that whole crowd, thousands abandoned him that day. They demanded that their immediate physical needs be met. Only the twelve disciples believed him and remained.

John 6:68-69 (CSB)

Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

As we take this bread, we remember Christ’s body, broken to take the punishment we all deserve. And as we take this cup, we remember Christ’s blood shed to pay the atoning sacrifice for our sin. That through faith in his work for us, we can be restored to relationship with God. And even though it will take the rest of our lives of facing tests in the desert to get there, we face those tests with hope, knowing they will point out things in our soul that need healing, and knowing that Jesus is that healer.