

EXODUS 15:22-27 THE FIRST TEST IN THE DESERT

It was one thing for the children of Israel to stand by the Red Sea and joyfully sing praises to God. It is quite something else to trust God in the daily wilderness walk. It is still the same for us today. We have a lot of lessons to learn in the school of life as we are in our wilderness wanderings and suffer painful experiences. We can learn a lot from the Israelites as we observe them in the wilderness. Life is a journey with many battles to fight and lessons to learn. One great victory doesn't mean there are no more challenges. Life is a school and there are many tests to take to pass this school. That is what the Israelites faced and many times they failed the test. They were given these tests so that they would learn to trust the Lord, even in difficult circumstances.

Israel's problems went much deeper than getting out of the bondage of the Egyptians. They needed to know God and that is why God didn't take them directly to Canaan. They must learn to trust and obey. So far they had seen the plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea, so they knew about God's power and sovereignty. On that foundation, the people had faith in Him. They knew that God could care for them. But did God care for them? This is what they needed to know. They needed to know that He could be depended upon to supply their needs. In the position they were in, they saw their own disability to care for themselves. God showed how He truly did care for them. If He would have led them straight to the Promised Land, they would not have been ready for what they would encounter there. Unfortunately, they didn't learn the lessons very well. Over and over they had to keep learning the same lessons.

Today we will see that God gave them a pretty severe test dealing with something so real as thirst. One can only go so long without water and that is what God used to show His providential care. He sometimes takes His people to the extremes so they will have their focus entirely on Him, knowing that He is the only source for everything.

1. IN THE WILDERNESS

(V 22-23)

A. BROUGHT

From the verb, it appears that the people were not that eager to go into the wilderness. Moses had to bring them into the desert. It was almost a coercion by Moses to get them out there. Who really wants to go out into the wilderness anyway?

Abundance---Red Sea experience

God had proved Himself abundantly faithful

From mountaintop experience to reality (Mark 9:5) They just had come off a spiritual high and now they would like to linger there. The great moments help us to get through the not so great moments, which were coming.

B. WILDERNESS OF SHUR

They were in the most northern part of the Sinai Peninsula.

It was a vast expansion of desert that was 250 miles long and 150 miles wide. They truly were in the wilderness.

Expectation---When we enjoy abundance, we expect continued abundance. We anticipate more blessings. The danger in that is that we think that abundance is a personal right. But that is not realistic and that is what God wants to show them here. The Israelites expected more blessings and miracles that would keep them safe and satisfied. They were looking ahead riding that glory train expecting more abundance. God had something else in mind.

Three days---They might be thinking that there is to be a three day festival in worshipping the Lord as Moses had requested from Pharaoh.---3:18

A vast expanse of desolation awaited them instead. It was not an easy way to live but God demonstrates His love for them here as a father for His child.

God could have very easily brought them right into Canaan, even instantly. He could take us from this earthly journey and drop us right into heaven. Wouldn't it be great if we would be instantly mature without battles, conflicts, and suffering? How simple it would be to be touching down on the golden pavement as soon as we would become Christians.

But God wills that we go through the desert to be tested. That makes us long for heaven and His presence. God doesn't test us so He would know our hearts, but that we would see our hearts as they are. The Israelites didn't know their own hearts. The problem with our hearts is that they are desperately wicked, who can know? Jere 17:9

C. NO WATER

Disappointment—They could not find water and they naturally fixed their eyes on their circumstances. Now they were wondering if maybe God brought them out there to die of thirst. One day without water would be very difficult, but three days, that is an extreme test. This involved children and animals. This was indeed no light temptation to suffer thirst for 3 days in a dry land and nowhere to meet with relief or remedy. No wonder they would have groaned with anxiety, but grief with this kind of complaining deserves no pardon.. At this time they should have directed their prayers to God. They did not pray, but instead went after Moses and demanded of him water, which only God could give. They commanded Moses who was in the person of a servant of God.

D. BITTER WATER

Marah means bitter. It was not drinkable, so this made the situation worse. It was so brackish they couldn't choke it down. It was like being out in the middle of the ocean but even with all the water around, it was not drinkable. This had to be very disappointing.

Exodus 1:14

“ He might have given them sweet water at first, but God wished by the Bitter to make prominent the bitterness which lurked in their hearts.”

John Calvin

2. COMPLAINT

(V 24)

A. GRUMBLING, MURMURING

They are experts when it comes to complaining.

They again use their own perception of their circumstances as the standard to base reality. God is above those circumstances.

They have not learned that, so they grumble, and God uses this to teach them about Himself. They however grumbled many times.

This is a rebellious complaining. They have an attitude of contempt.

Exodus 16:1-12, Numbers 11:1-35, 14:2, 27-29, 16:41,

17:1-10 Deut 1:27, Ps 78:17-ff, 106:14

We should learn from this not to be grumblers. We are so privileged.

Our attitude of our circumstances can effect others watching us.

B. WHAT SHALL WE DRINK?

Their complaining was evidence of unbelief.

Anxious hearts—Mt 6:21, 25-33 They don't realize who the source is. They worried for their very lives, but God would take care of them.

Complaining doesn't solve problems. They just needed to keep focused on what God was going to do. He hadn't failed yet.

They turned against Moses again, as they will continually. He is the spokesman for God.

3. PRAYER

(V 25)

Moses cried out to the Lord---15:25 Moses alone prayed.

He knew to take His problems to the Lord. He is always the One to turn to.

4. PROVISION (VV 25-27)

God is very gracious. He does not even pronounce a judgment on them.

They were tempting Him but God's anger is not the focus here.

God stepped in to meet the need. What mercy God has. "He supplied such wicked, and rebellious, and ungrateful men." John Calvin

A. TREE AND SWEET WATER

If God would not have intervened the children of Israel would have died of thirst.

God gave Moses instructions. God was going to instruct Moses in the ways of life and health, spiritual, physical and social. This is a forerunner of the 10 Commandments that would be given.

Grace

God can solve our problems by changing things He can give us sometimes what is easy for us and what we know as blessings. God does this frequently.

God can solve our problems by giving us the grace

we need to bear with our difficulties and not complain.—Sometimes we might have to go through the difficulty but He always gives us the grace needed.

B. TEST---CALL FOR OBEDIENCE

Instructions--- Statute and an ordinance

Reason for test---Ex 20:20

God does not test them to see if they are worthy. No one is worthy.

It is through passing and failing the tests that they learn the nature of obedience. These are vital lessons for them to learn at this juncture.

The deeper lesson is that he wants a relationship with them. As they are to see Him as a covenant God.

God led Israel into the wilderness to humble them and test them according to Deut 8:2. He does this to stretch the spiritual muscles. The roots need to dig firmly into faith.

God sovereignly designs the wilderness as a test. He knows what we need.

James 1:12-18, Hebrews 12:1-11

Trusting and obeying—If Israel was to know God, it would only be through trust and obedience. Would they learn to follow instructions?

God gives promises if they obey. He is saying stick with me and you will never see the problems of Egypt again.

The attitude we have toward our difficulties determines which way we will go. Trust is the bedrock on which our decisions are to be made.

"After God had tried His people, by the want of water, He at the same time admonished them by His word, that hereafter they should submit themselves

more teachably and obediently to His commands.” John Calvin

C. JEHOVAH ROPHA

They learn something about their God. This is another name for God.

He is the Healer.

If they would do, they would experience physical health. God is the healer.

Physical health would point to spiritual health.

God promised physical afflictions if they disobeyed. –Deut 7:12-15,28

The Israelites were liable to the same plagues which the Egyptians had suffered, and were only immune from the plagues because God was the Healer. There is no health in us except that God spares us.

D. OASIS

God can solve our problems by giving us even more.

Elim---water, comfort, rest There were 12 springs here and palm trees for shade. This is a reversal of the desert and foretaste of things to come.

There is a blessed end for what we look forward to as we persevere.

God is a God of balance and when He is done with the test He gives rest. He knows how to humble us and exactly how much we can take.

If life was all one test after another, we would get discouraged. But if it was all pleasure, we would never be disciplined and have our character developed.

This pictures the entrance into the Promised Land. It is a glimpse of what is to come, the lush land of Canaan.

The desert is a hostile territory, we are just passing through. This World is not my home. It is God’s world and He owns it and is in control But our gaze should be on where we are heading. We must be on guard against judging our circumstances by our feelings. They defined their circumstances by their own perceptions. We should view them the way that God views them. Phil 4:11-13—Learn to be content whatever the circumstances. The times of testing are a great gift from God.