

"Among Us or Not?"

The experience of getting to the Promised Land finally really begins... And it starts, interestingly, with **a really long walk through a really difficult place**. THE WALK THROUGH THE WILDERNESS. So difficult for these people that it took way longer than it might have. (My count is that it took 38 years longer than it should have. Forty years instead of two.)

NOTICE: God was entirely in control of all the details, and there were significant problems from the start!

Just three days in, a major problem. A water shortage! (In the desert!)

Exodus 15:22-24 Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. **They went three days in the wilderness and found no water.** When they came to Marah, **they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter**; therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, **"What shall we drink?"**

And God himself solved the problem. **Exodus 15:25** And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and **the water became sweet.**

So the people had the chance to really learn a really important lesson: that **God can be turned to for the solution to real life problems**: God uses his power not just to punish his enemies but to meet our needs. *Good to know!*

Then what? The Lord made a new rule; **Exodus 15:25-26** There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer."

WHAT TO KNOW:

1. **In their journey out of slavery into freedom, God tests his people.**

And then? **Exodus 15:27** Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

2. **In their journey out of slavery into freedom, God rests his people.** A week or so in "Palm Springs"! And it would have been good for them all, then in the shade of all those palm trees, to quietly reflect upon what they had just experienced and what they had learned, because of what was approaching! What was approaching? *More problems. More tests.*

Problem #2: another big one! *A food shortage.*

Exodus 16:1-3 They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness ...on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Again, God solves their problem.

Exodus 16:4,5 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, **that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.**

[NOTICE THIS AGAIN: the problems along the way are tests. And it should be clear to us that the tests are tests of faith!]

God gave them both bread AND meat. **Exodus 16:13-16** In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, **"What is it?"** For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, **"It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.** Now see what happens after that: **Exodus 16:17-36** ..."This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.' " And then on the next day: ... "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." ... The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." So the people rested on the seventh day.

Can you see what God is doing? He is testing them and he is resting them! And then?

Exodus 17:1-3 *Another drinking problem!* All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? **Why do you test the Lord?**" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "**Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?**"

3. Sometimes in their journey out of slavery into freedom, God's people test him!

NOTICE THIS: While God was testing their faith, they began testing God's faithfulness! This is a sure way to fail the test of faith! And then?

Exodus 17:4-7 So Moses cried to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." And the Lord said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because **they tested the Lord** by saying, "**Is the Lord among us or not?**"

4. In Israel's experience, "the tests and the rests" were designed to point people to Christ.

NOTICE this about the food shortage and God's solution to it. **John 6:30-35** So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. **For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**" They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "**I am the bread of life**; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

NOTICE this about the water shortages and God's solution to it. **1 Corinthians 10:1-4** For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. **For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.**

NOTICE this about the Sabbath. (**Hebrews 3:1-4:16**) e.g. **Hebrews 4:9,14** So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God... Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

(Baptism is ALSO a picture of the same thing: ULTIMATELY, the solution to our problem IS Christ!

WHAT TO DO:

a) Determine to pass the tests by learning and obeying the relevant commandments. Anything less is testing God! **Exodus 17:7** ... they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

b) Make the most of "the tests and the rests" by seeing Jesus in all the details of all of your experiences. Is the Lord among us or not? Is the Lord involved in the details of your life or not? Are you really trusting him, from the heart, about your most serious problems?

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Philippians 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

NEXT SERMON: (December 6, "Communion"): "**Too Heavy For You**" [Exodus 17:8 – 18:27]