

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Wednesday Morning Women’s Bible Study
Week #12

Exodus 15:22 – 17:7

December 6, 2023

Introductory Thoughts

1. This section ends Israel’s dealings with Egypt and moves us to Israel’s Wandering in the Wilderness
2. Modern folks need to remember that the people themselves did not know what was coming – and we must try to read this texts with the same sense of mystery, fear, and surprise that were part of the ancient Jews’ experience

Exodus 15:22-27

3. The narrative pattern of this section has already been found in Exodus, and will be repeated many times:
 - a. A problem arises
 - b. The people complain
 - c. Moses intercedes
 - d. God responds
4. Following the great victory of God over the Egyptians at the Red Sea, a new and immediate problem presents itself: there is no water
5. Note that God responds immediately to this problem: lack of water is not an issue that can be put off very long
6. The bark & leaves of some trees can actually sweeten water
7. God directs Moses to use what is already a part of the created order so that water can be provided for the people
8. That this “miracle” is accomplished via “natural” means is no less a miracle because it is God who created the natural order
9. The Bible often tells us that God expects and allows humans to manage the resources of creation for the purpose of creating, healing, and renewing life
10. Verses 25b-26 indicate that the people’s freedom from Egypt has now made them available for obedience to God
11. This giving of an ordinance *precedes* the giving of the Law at Sinai, indicating that from the very start, Israel will find true life *only* as it obeys God’s instruction and attends to God’s presence with them
12. Another way to say this is that Israel must learn to trust God always
13. God as rescuer, redeemer, healer, and life saver is the same God who is the Creator
14. The wandering in the wilderness that has now begun is a time of reorientation for Israel, reorientation back to the way all human relationship is meant to be: toward God
15. Finally, in this section, Israel is led toward a “permanent” oasis where water is always available. But another crisis will appear!

Exodus 16:1-36

16. Now, the people are hungry. So again, they complain, and they want to go backward. Still, they are not fully prepared to trust God.
17. A few notes about the “miracles” of the quail and the manna.
 - a. If all of human life depends on miraculous occurrences, then what place does the natural order (God’s creation) have? (Answer: none)
 - b. Israel began to understand that God was just as much present in the natural order as in the supernatural order
 - c. The Bible finds that God is present in all of life, not just the so-called “special” moments

- d. Manna – a certain type of insect produces from the fruit of the tamarisk tree a whitish flake or ball of juice that congeals when cold, is sweet and full of sugars, can be baked into a type of bread, and decays quickly
 - e. Quails – migrating birds from Africa are sometimes blown in off the Mediterranean and can be exhausted enough to be caught by hand
 - f. To suggest “natural” causes for these “miraculous” events does not diminish the power of the God behind them – instead, it points us to the miraculous nature of all of life
18. Note: in the plagues, the goodness of creation was reversed (the people could not drink the water, and the rain of hail destroyed the food), but now, creation’s order is restored (and the people can drink, and food itself is “rained” down from heaven)
19. Note: Moses’ staff once made the Nile undrinkable, but now it brings forth water
20. Note: the purpose of all of this is so that the people will know (or learn to know) that there is a God who provides for daily life
21. Here we see that God’s regular provision is noted and memorialized through the celebration of Sabbath
- a. A time of rest
 - b. A time to reflect on our daily dependence on God
 - c. A time to worship God from out of the experience of daily life – hence making all of life an act of worship

Exodus 17:1-7

22. The people continue to move. Life is a journey, and there is no final or permanent home where the people will not find themselves dependent on God.
23. Later, when Israel reaches the promised homeland, they will discover that still they are dependent on God
24. Another crisis emerges: the need for water (once again)
25. Israel “tests” God – and God is faithful – but only as and when God chooses – God is not our servant
26. The names Massah & Meribah would become synonymous with testing God, a matter taken up even in the New Testament
27. Note: scholars are not able to agree on the actual route or timing of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness
28. Note: Israel’s obedience to God and use of the natural resources of creation are linked together here, a fact that adds to our modern concern for the wise use (stewardship) of creation, and the disastrous results when we are less than wise

Questions for Your Life Today

- A. How has God met your needs in the past? What needs do you have today? What needs do you anticipate in the future?
- B. Think about nostalgia. Why are we so fond of the past? What does this say about who we are? How does this dynamic connect with God?
- C. Moses was often unpopular with the people. How do we know when our leaders are taking us in the right direction? Or in the wrong direction?
- D. Human science has helped us learn how better to correctly use God’s creation. But it also has presented us with new problems. How can we manage this situation so that we derive the benefits of science without suffering the potential downsides?
- E. In what ways have we learned to be better stewards of God’s creation?

Notes by The Rev. Dr. Jack Baca, Senior Pastor, The Village Church, Rancho Santa Fe, California

Resources:

- a. Interpretation Commentary on Exodus, Terence E. Fretheim, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1991
- b. The Communicator’s Commentary Series, Old Testament, Exodus, Maxie D. Dunnam, Word, Inc., Waco, TX, 1987
- c. The Old Testament Library: Exodus, Brevard S. Childs, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1974