

**PUTTING DOWN ROOTS OF FAITH**  
*The Life of Moses: Deliverance through Faith.*  
**Exodus 15:22-17:7**  
 Chadron Berean Church

As a church we have this vision to be like a tree that is well-rooted and bearing fruit for God's glory by God's grace. And today we want to think about the roots and how necessary they are. Before a tree does anything, it has to put down roots. If a tree doesn't have good roots, it won't be a strong and fruitful tree. It just won't go anywhere. Think about the difference between tumble weeds and oak trees. Tumble weeds grow up quickly and only have one single tap root that when those strong winds come up, they break off and are blown away. But trees, like an oak tree, grow strong and bear fruit through slow and steady growth. They put down serious root systems to see them through harsh conditions. Like an oak, God will send trials into our lives to test our root systems—our faith—in Him. That's sort of what we want to talk about today as we continue our study on the life of Moses—how we need roots of faith during times of difficulty.

Last week we witnessed Israel's deliverance through the Red Sea. It was an awesome moment where God received all the glory (Ex. 14:14) and Israel sang a song of deliverance, praising God for His faithfulness, saying things like, "*Who is like You, O Yahweh?... You are my strength and my song, my salvation.*" It had to be such a mountain-top experience for them. Finally, they made it! He got them out of Egypt. But now their tone changes again as Yahweh begins the process begins to get Egypt out of them. We pick it up in verse 22 of chapter 15. I'm using the *Legacy Standard Bible* again because it highlights the name Yahweh (LORD).

*15:22 Then Moses had Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 And they came to Marah, but they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. 24 So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 Then he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.*

### I. **ISRAEL GRUMBLES OVER BITTER WATER. (15:22-27)**

So the Israelites have made it through the Red Sea and now are on a journey to Mt. Sinai through the wilderness—God's place of training and testing. And like our sermon a few weeks ago, the "Wilderness Studies" continue but this time not just for Moses. It's for the people of Israel as well as God prepares them for a covenant relationship with Him and to be a light among the nations through a series of tests as they journey to Sinai.

In this rugged wilderness between Egypt and Midian (northwest Saudi Arabia), it can be very difficult to find water. The text tells us the Israelites go **3 days** without finding water and when they finally do, it's not potable. It's undrinkable. It's **bitter**. But this is a genuine need. A basic need. There are a lot of them and a lot of animals who desperately need a drink. So they call this place "**Marah**" which means bitter. So the people start to **grumble at Moses**. They're

complaining to Moses. It's amazing how fast they go (like the flick of a switch) from praising God to complaining—from glorifying to grumbling—when their focus shifts from Yahweh's faithfulness to their set of circumstances. And before we're tempted to look down our noses at them, let's ask ourselves, "*What is our first response to hardships in life?*" Is it faith? Is it, "*Let's see how God is going to work in this hardship?*" Or is it grumbling? I don't know about you but sometimes it only takes the slightest inconvenience for me to grumble, especially when it comes to basic needs like food. Consider how *hangry* you get when you miss a meal or you're late for a meal. Just think about those long family road trips like Israel is on. Everyone is always concerned about finding food—so many questions about food. I'm hungry. I'm thirsty. Where are we going eat? When are we going to eat? We'll plan the entire vacation with food in mind. I can hear it now, "*If you keep grumbling, I'll turn this car around!*" Isn't that how it goes?

While we shouldn't get proud, the text clearly does present the **grumbling** as a **spiritual failure**. It is a serious sin. And in looking to Moses, **they fail to look to Yahweh**—the all-powerful, all-sufficient, self-existent one—**to provide for them**. They blamed Moses and don't trust Yahweh who is guiding them. So Moses looks to God for an answer and the Lord shows him a **tree** that upon throwing it in the waters, makes the waters **sweet**. And there's really no good explanation for this, at least on this scale to get water to all these people in the wilderness. It's a miracle.

*25 There He set for them a statute and a judgment, and there He tested them. 26 And He said, "If you will earnestly listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, Yahweh, am your healer." 27 Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.*

So here we want to note that as the Israelites journey to Mt. Sinai, He is preparing them for a **conditional covenant** with them where they will function as a theocratic, mediating kingdom with God as King and present among them in the promised land. And if they keep this conditional Mosaic Covenant, God will bless their nation. If they don't, God will have to chasten them like He did Egypt. You get a taste of that conditional covenant here. Some prosperity gospel preachers want to use verse 26 to say that if you obey God, you won't get sick or get cancer or things like that. Basically, the promise is that if you follow Jesus, He'll make you healthy and wealthy. But that sort of interpretation disregards many of the teachings of Jesus saying things like if you follow Me, they'll persecute you. Or the overall context of our passage where **God is intentionally bringing trials into their life to test their faith** (v. 25). The diseases here are not sicknesses and cancer. They are the plagues of the Exodus for a people under the Mosaic Law. As a general rule though (not a promise), a life of obedience to God does bring well-being and blessing and disobedience may bring discipline if we truly are His children (Heb. 12:3-11). But not every hardship in our lives is the result of disobedience. Sometimes God brings hardship into our lives to test our faith in Him—to see if we fear Him and trust Him not only when things are prosperous and successful, but when things are hard.<sup>1</sup>

But look at how patient God is by stepping in to meet this grumbling peoples' needs. They come to know God by a new name: *Jehovah Rophe*. **Yahweh is my healer**. Isn't that what happens? The more we walk with God, the more we grow, and we begin to know Him in different ways,

by new names. He is my Savior, my provider, the one who sees me, etc. After this, Yahweh takes them to **Elim**, a place with twelve springs of water and seventy palms. Sounds like a place to vacation! Elim shows us they shouldn't have become so impatient. He has the means of providing refreshment.

*1 Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. 2 And the whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 And the sons of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to put this whole assembly to death with hunger.”*

## II. ISRAEL GRUMBLES ABOUT FOOD. (16:1-36)

First, water. Then, food. Israel leaves the cushy palm springs resort and is back in the wilderness. They start to complain about food now—railing against Moses and Aaron now. And notice their selective memory starts to kick in. They look back on Egypt as if it was some paradise instead of a place of slavery and meager means. Isn't it funny how we can look back on the past with rose-colored glasses and talk about the good ole' days? But so much of that is our selective memory picking out the highlights. Our imaginations amplify things. If we are dreaming about the past unrealistically, it might be a sign that we're complaining or discontent in the present. But God is gracious again. He doesn't rain down fire and brimstone on them. He rains down bread.

*4 Then Yahweh said to Moses, “Behold, I will 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 or not they will walk in My law. 5 Now it will be on the sixth day, they shall prepare what they bring in, and it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, “At evening you will know that Yahweh has brought you out of the land of Egypt; 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of Yahweh, for He hears your grumblings against Yahweh; and what are we, that you grumble against us?” 8 And Moses said, “This will happen when Yahweh gives you meat to eat in the evening and bread to the full in the morning; for Yahweh hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against Yahweh.” 9 Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, ‘Come near before Yahweh, for He has heard your grumblings.’” 10 Now it happened as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they turned toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of Yahweh appeared in the cloud. 11 And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 12 “I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread, so that you shall know that I am Yahweh your God.’”*

So this is pretty convicting stuff, isn't it? It's because we complain and grumble so much. It can be an ugly, unspiritual habit that takes root in our hearts. It's certainly not a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-24)! It's being **contrasted with a spiritual response of faith** in hardship. It shows us that our complaints—even though on the surface are directed at other people—ultimately land at the feet of our sovereign God who put us there. We know that grumbling against God isn't good,

so we grumble to others about our circumstances and blame others. But the whole time *we are really grumbling against God*. One man said that complaining reveals a deeper dissatisfaction with our sovereign God.<sup>2</sup> If we are grumbling about circumstances out of our control, are we not grumbling against God who is in control? That's why Moses keeps pointing Israel to Yahweh.

And it's interesting how God just keeps on testing them. Even *the meeting of their need with manna brings another test*. First they dine on the migratory **quail** in that area that God brings their way. Then on the **manna** the next morning. The manna is obviously more interesting. It's supernatural bread from heaven. It was a versatile, fine, flake-like bread that tasted like honey wafers and melted away when the sun grew hot. Psalms calls it the bread of angels. I guess you could say it's the first angel-food cake! You'll have to read the rest of the chapter on your own to learn more, but they could gather it **6 days a week** and on the 6<sup>th</sup> day they would gather enough for two days. The one day per week it didn't grow was on the **Sabbath**. Again, that's something you can't explain that naturally, nor how it ceased once they entered the promised land.

The manna and Sabbath were together, a test. *Are you going to work 7 days per week or are you going to trust God to provide?* I don't remember exactly how it went but several years ago when I was a young believer, I was talking to a local trucker during that I hadn't seen at church in a while. He said that he was working 7 days a week, trying to pay off his truck and get into a more secure place. While admirable, I thought, "*God will provide for you if honor Him and gather with His people on the Lord's day.*" Unfortunately, I don't recall seeing him in church again. But that's what can happen. Taking a day off of work for corporate worship can be a real test for us.

Manna is a test because they **could not stockpile** it. If they kept it more than a day (except on the Sabbath), it would get **foul** and become **wormy**. God provided enough for their **daily bread only**. He's teaching them a daily bread principle where they are required to depend on Him moment by moment. *Will they trust God to provide for their daily provisions?* The rest of chapter 16 goes on to talk about the manna. Chapter 17 begins with another test.

*1 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of Yahweh, and they camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people contended with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you test Yahweh?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to put us and our children and our livestock to death with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to Yahweh, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." 5 Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 So he named the place Massah and Meribah because of the contending of the sons of Israel, and because they tested Yahweh, saying, "Is Yahweh among us or not?"*

### III. **ISRAEL QUARRELS OVER NO WATER. (17:1-7)**

So they go from bitter water, to lacking food, to lacking water. How do they respond? Third times a charm! Do they respond in faith? Trusting God and seeking God in prayer, saying, “*Let’s see the how Yahweh will provide this time!*” Nope. They contended, or **quarreled**, with Moses. It’s an even stronger term than grumble. They *demand* water. And Moses’ life is now seriously threatened by these people who *blame him* for bringing them where they are. They even test the Lord, saying, “*Is Yahweh among us or not?*” That’s anything but an expression of faith. They are shaking their fists at God and at Moses.

This time, rather than striking the people, God has Moses **strike a rock** and draw water out of it before all the people, not to draw attention to Moses but to save his life and establish some more credibility. **Psalm 105:41** says, “*He opened a rock, and water gushed out; it flowed like a stream in the desert.*” It’s another miraculous provision. But Moses doesn’t want them to look back on this moment with rose-colored glasses either. He names the place **Massah** and **Meribah** which mean **quarrel** and **test**, so that when they speak of it in the future, it will remind them of how they failed the spiritual test that day. He wants them and the next generation to learn from history so that they don’t repeat it. We memorialize events too. We say things like, “Remember the Alamo” or “Remember 9/11”. There are events, both negative and positive, we want to remember and learn from. “Remember the Meribah” is one for the Israelites. I can imagine it’s a moment they would like to have back too. But life is like a coin. Spend it any way you want too, but you can only spend it once.<sup>3</sup>

I think that thought makes for a good transition into our summary this morning. It’s no accident that when Christians read the story of the Exodus, they see parallels to the Christian life because what takes place here, like Paul says in the NT, was “*written for our instruction*” (Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). So what instruction do we receive from this? The main thing I want to highlight as it relates to our vision is that:

### **Hardship tests and develops the roots of faith.**

Sometimes hardships are the result of our own disobedience, but sometimes they are divinely appointed **tests of faith**, meant to test the roots of our faith (see how strong they are) and develop the roots of our faith. They’re purposefully designed to test our **trust** in Him and **dependence** upon Him (Deut. 8:2). It’s the times of want—not of plenty—that test our faith. Those are the times when we reach the end of ourselves and we come to know God as we see Him exercise His Yahweh-ness. He proves His ability to meet our needs, both daily needs (like that of the stomach) and our deepest needs (like that of our hearts). We develop a real, trust-relationship with Him. We sense His patience and tender care for us the most.

Once again, if we want to learn from Moses, we can learn how to lead others patiently and just keep pointing them to Yahweh and His **sovereignty**. We’re talking about it a lot in Exodus but it’s so key for people being **rooted** and **stable** and **healthy** in difficult times. Belief in God’s sovereignty decreases our tendency to complain (we understand He is good and in control) and it increases our capacity for faith and inner strength through times of trouble (knowing He is good and in control). Moses does a good job as a spiritual leader by continually and repetitively turning the peoples’ eyes to the Lord and not to himself. He wants the people confident in Yahweh’s leadership in their life. Rooted in His sovereign care.

As a gardener right now, I'm just getting started nursing seedlings. Some of my seedlings want to grow leggy and wimpy and they're going to die if I don't do something. So one of the things I do is I provide some wind—a fan—to blow on the seedlings (not too little, not too much). When they sense that wind, they start putting roots down and strengthening their stem. It's like a tree. Sometimes bracing a tree with tie downs is counterproductive because the winds help that tree grow strong. The tree strengthens as it senses the winds. Well, the trials in our lives are kind of like that. Our roots of faith grow deeper in harsh conditions, bringing about deep changes in our hearts. James says to consider trials a joy because the testing of our faith makes us perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (Jas. 1:2-4). We don't have to be driven and tossed by the wind (1:6). So often we just want to "get through this trial" and move on to something else.

We feel that we shouldn't have to go through tests multiple times. But we are a forgetful people and God I think demands more faith as we grow. We can be **comforted** by the fact that **we journey in stages according to the command of Yahweh**. He knows just the tests we need and how long we need them—how much wind to supply. Like they say, when He puts us in the furnace of affliction, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat, carefully refining our faith as fire refines gold (1 Pet. 1:6-7).

We can also be comforted by how He **provides places of respite**. Places of rest. The Christian life is not all hardship—not all desert. We all have our **Marah's**, but we also have our **Elim's** in life. Both seasons are ordered by the Lord. Marah and Elim show us that He can make any **bitter** circumstance into something **sweet** through those who have faith. Just this morning I came across a post by a friend that described a pastor having breakfast with a old farmer. The farmer prayed for the meal. "Lord, I hate buttermilk. I hate lard. And you know I don't care for raw flour." The pastor was starting to feel uncomfortable. "But Lord," he prayed, "when you mix them all together and bake them, I do love warm, fresh biscuits. So when things come up that I don't like and things get hard, when we don't understand what You're doing or saying, help us just to relax and wait until You're done mixing. It well probably be better than biscuits. Amen."

As we close, I want to ask, "*How do you want your life to be memorialized? For your faith or lack thereof?*" Because I can't help but think of the kind of people who it seems like no matter what life throws at them, you never see them complain. You see them trust God. They didn't get bitter. They got better. They suffered well. Those are the kind of people we want to be like when we grow up, right? They're lights in the world. At least that's what Paul says in Philippians 2:14-15, "*Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.*"

If you're here this morning and don't know where you will spend eternity, you need to know that the NT says Jesus is the sinless "rock" that was stricken by God for your sins so that you didn't have to be struck by God. He was struck to provide you with life-saving spiritual water (Is. 53:5; John 4:14; 7:37-38). He is the "manna" (bread) that came down from heaven to save a hungry, dying people (John 6:58). When you believe in Him, trusting Him as your Savior, you will find all the satisfaction for your soul needs now and you will live forever. He satisfies eternally.

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<sup>1</sup> Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014), 414.

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<sup>2</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 81.

<sup>3</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 245.