**Session 16: Week 9**

***God of Deliverance***

**Exodus 15:22-16:36**

**12-13 December 2022**

**Review** – The last time we met, we saw the beautiful deliverance of Israel as God led them on dry ground through the Red Sea and then destroyed all their enemies. They had been in this untenable situation, trapped between Pharaoh’s army and a vast sea of water: the newborn nation of Israel, and Pharaoh was coming to kill the newborn, just as we saw in the opening scenes of Exodus. Once again, their great Midwife comes to deliver them safely to the other side. We saw Miriam and all the other women singing and dancing with tambourines as they celebrate **the *defining event* of the Old Testament.** This deliverance is the equivalent of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ in the New Testament.

**Bitter Waters Made Sweet: Test #1** – The first event of note as the people began their journey through the wilderness was seeing bitter water made sweet. (The word “Marah” means bitter.) Note the word repetitions in chapters 15-18: *bitter* (6 times), *wilderness* (10 times) and *water*. But what does the phrase “bitter water” mean? Basically it is stagnant water. The Old Testament writers wrote about water in one of two ways. Water was either stagnant or spring-fed. Stagnant water was usually referred to as *dead* water, whereas spring-fed water was called *living* water. So when we read that the bitter water was made sweet, we can understand that the dead water was turned to living water. But before this happened, the people were asking, in effect, “Can God be trusted?” And God supernaturally intervened and provided them with water that was safe to drink. But He also addressed the underlying fear that they had not articulated. They were afraid that God would treat them as He had the Egyptians. But God assures them that if they will HEAR His words and OBEY them, He will not bring any of the plagues or diseases on them that the Egyptians experienced.

**God’s Ways** – But we shouldn’t miss what is happening. The people wind up at a place with bitter water *because God led them there!* Remember that one of the components of the Passover Meal had been bitter herbs, as a reminder of the kind of slavery they were being delivered from. *God is not opposed to exposing us to the bitter that we might better recognize the sweet when it comes.* And that realization is for their good. Back in Egypt they had seen the sweet water of the Nile turned to dead, bitter water because of the stubborn unbelief of the Egyptians. But now God is giving them an object listen to show them if they listen to Him and obey, then they will see bitter water become sweet and life-giving. And in the midst of this exhortation, there is also a warning: in obedience there is safety.

**Grumble, Grumble, Grumble** – The word “grumbling” is repeated several times in this section of Exodus, which is significant because what do newborn babies do? They cry whenever they experience a need. But notice that just beyond the place of testing (waters of Marah) there was a place of unimaginable abundance (waters of Elim). And notice the numbers: 12 springs of water and 70 palm trees. There was one spring of water for each of the 12 tribes of Israel. And we have seen the number 70 twice before, to

tell us how many people were in Jacob’s family. So these two numbers together illustrate God’s perfect provision for the children of Jacob.

**Wilderness of Sin: Test #2** – The Israelites reached the Wilderness of Sin exactly one month after Passover. (The word “Sin” is related to the word “Sinai”, i.e. this area was located somewhere near Mount Sinai.) And then they grumbled again, this time about dying of hunger. Once again God delivers them, but He also tests them to see if they will obey Him in small things. Remember that those who are faithful in little things will be faithful in larger matters as well. These people have just come out of slavery and have little or no experience in providing for themselves, so God is giving them a test to train them while the consequences of disobedience are still relatively low. Notice that God tells them, “I will feed you…and *then you will know that I am Yahweh, your God.”* This statement echoes what He had said over and over again during the plagues: “Then Egypt will know that I am Yahweh.” Now in His faithfulness to His own children, He tells them, “I am your Healer. I am your Provider. So you will *know* that I am God.”

**Daily Bread** – The people had been gazing with longing back over their shoulders when they complained about not being fed as they had been in Egypt, just as Lot’s wife had gazed with longing back at Sodom, to her undoing. But then their gaze is directed toward the wilderness in front of them, and they see the glory of God compelling their attention. They have been wondering where their daily bread is going to come from, and God tells them to look toward the heavens, because it will come from there, from Him. This is in strong contrast to what had happened in Egypt. Egypt was an agricultural land, dependent on the waters of the Nile. So when the Egyptians wanted “daily bread,” they had to look DOWN: down toward the ground, first to work it and then again to harvest the crops. But God is telling His children to look UP to see bread raining down for which they cannot labor.

**Two Requirements for Gathering the Manna** – “Those who gathered little had no lack, and those who gathered much had nothing left over.” So everyone ended up with exactly what they needed. Jen thinks that this is because those with surplus shared what they had with their needy neighbors, and she challenges us to think about identifying those with whom we can share our own surplus. This concept is similar to what we read in Acts about those in the early church who held everything in common and distributed it according to people’s needs. So the people were commanded first to *gather what they needed* of the manna; then they were told *not to hoard* it. If each of us was content with our daily bread, those of us who lack would not be tempted to steal, because others would share their excess with us. And in not keeping our excess, we would not be tempted to say, “Who needs the Lord?”

**A Third Requirement: Rest** – The Lord told the people that He would send enough manna on the sixth day to last them for two days and that any manna left over on the sixth day would “keep” overnight, i.e. it would not breed worms and stink. God intended for them to *rest* on the seventh day. “Resting” would have been a new concept for them to take in, since their entire lives as slaves had been spent working hard, with no days off. Pharaoh had even accused them of being “lazy,” and brutally increased their work

load. But now Yahweh is commanding them to refrain from any work at all every seventh day. They almost had to be physically restrained from gathering on the seventh day. Scripture tells us that the manna tasted like wafers flavored with honey—so God provided sweet water for them to drink and sweet bread for them to eat.

**Sojourners in the Wilderness** – Moses tells us that manna was provided for the people in the wilderness until the time when they were to enter the promised land, 40 years later. The wilderness was uninhabitable; they couldn’t plant crops and reap them, but had to depend on God for their daily bread and for water to drink. So Yahweh provided the Israelites with living water and the bread of life. Centuries later Jesus Christ would say, “I AM the living water. I AM the bread that came down from heaven.” Jesus fulfills both of these signs.

**What About Us?** – Those of us who are believers have been delivered from slavery to sin, brought out through the waters of baptism to sojourn in the uninhabitable wilderness of this world. So when Jesus taught His followers to pray, He instructed them to ask their heavenly Father for daily bread. But what does this mean? Certainly there are those who literally have to depend on the Lord to have something to eat each day. They have physical needs that must be met. But we also have spiritual needs that are every bit as important. Remember that God’s Firstborn Son, Jesus, went through the waters of baptism and then was immediately led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. Why? To be tempted. He was there for 40 days—40 days in which He will fulfill *all* righteousness. The 40 years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness were years of failure, followed by repentance, and then failure again. But when the true and better Firstborn Son arrives, He will fulfill all righteousness. The very first temptation that Satan placed before Him involved bread. He knew that Jesus was hungry after the fasting He had done, and so he suggested that He turn some stones into bread to eat. But Jesus countered with, “IT IS WRITTEN, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Father.’”

**Living by Doing God’s Will** – Some time later, when Jesus has been very busy ministering to people, His disciples are concerned about Him and ask, “Have you had anything to eat?” He responds, “My food—my daily bread—is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.” (John 4:34) So too, we are not going to live just by physical bread, but by the Word of God and by His will revealed to us each day. So each morning when we wake up, we should say to our Father, “Give me this day what you would have me *do*.” Unfortunately, we tend to interpret this as meaning, “Tell me where I should go…or which place I should visit…or what I should purchase…or whatever.” It is important to remember that we are specifically told in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 what God’s will is, “This is the will of God for your life: your *sanctification;* that we would *be holy* as He is holy.” So when we ask God to reveal His will for us, what we are saying is, “Show me how I can live in holiness today.” Instead of asking, “What should I *do*?” we should be asking, “Who should I *be*? Lord, draw me into reflecting with ever increasing accuracy the radiance of your Son.”