

Part 22

The Test of Continuing Faith (15:22-16:3)

- From the start the Israelites had shown a strange mixture of faith and unbelief

The people of Israel were led away from the 'Reed Sea' (as it should be called) and were taken towards Mount Sinai^{¶1}. They go three days journey from the Reed Sea, to a place called the 'wilderness of Shur'.

^{¶1} 15:22

From the start the Israelites had shown a strange mixture of faith and unbelief. Even at the very point when they were being redeemed they had criticised Moses^{¶1} and had expected to die in the wilderness^{¶2}. They were speaking of dying in the wilderness even before they left Egypt^{¶3}!

^{¶1} 15:11

^{¶2} 15:11

^{¶3} 15:12

For the second time – unbelief mixed with faith

- Their unbelief was a sin of ingratitude

Now, for the second time, they show the unbelief which is mixed in with their faith. They came to Marah – the word means 'Bitterness'. It was called 'Marah' because the water there was so bitter in taste that it was undrinkable^{¶1}. For the second time they turn to grumbling and complaining. Again their grumbling is especially directed at Moses, the leader God has given to them^{¶2}.

^{¶1} 15:23

^{¶2} 15:24

- Moses' response – nothing but pray

This Israelite unbelief was a serious matter. It was a sin of ingratitude. One would expect them to be joyful and triumphant. They had seen the utter destruction of Pharaoh; he had been totally removed from ever bothering them again. They were failing to learn from what God had done. If He had delivered them in such a mighty way at the crossing of the Reed Sea, could God not do a similar work on their behalf to rescue them?

^{¶1} 15:25a

- The significance of Marah – God tested them

Moses' response to their criticism is to do nothing but pray^{¶1}. God answered him as he was interceding for His people. Moses was shown a tree and was led to throw the tree into the large pool at Marah. The pool became sweet, and the people were able to drink the water.

- Will they continue to believe?

Exodus 15:25b explains the significance of what had happened: 'there he tested them'. After we have experienced redemption God may test us to find out – and let us ourselves find out – whether we shall continue to believe, despite the practical problems that might confront us. The God who saves us also meets our needs as He continues to lead and guide us. If God had wonderfully rescued them from Egypt, the rest of His promises would be fulfilled as well. He had said He would take them to Mount Sinai^{¶1}. God would certainly keep His promise. There was no need for the grumbling. The answer would have come **without their having to grumble and complain**. They were being tested. Could they face an alarming situation and yet continue to trust God so that they would not turn to grumbling and the criticism of their God-given leader?

^{¶1} 3:12

- God's provision – complaining was unnecessary

They have been rescued from the angel of death, rescued from the wrath of Pharaoh, now they are rescued from the threat of fatal thirst at Marah. The sweetening of the waters enables them to meet their need of water, and little further along the way they come to Elim where there was an abundance of refreshment. At that place there were twelve springs and seventy date palms. They were able to rest at that spot and be abundantly refreshed. Their complaining was unnecessary.

- Intended to be a permanent lesson

What had happened at Marah was intended to be a permanent lesson for the Israelites. God made for them a 'statute', a permanent principle. He was letting them see by a practical experience that their ingratitude and complaining and criticism of Moses was all entirely unnecessary. God makes them an offer. If they will obey God, He will keep them free from the diseases of the Egyptians. It is not a promise that no sickness at all will ever come to them, but the kind of sicknesses that troubled the Egyptians will not trouble them. It is the very character of God to heal:

- God's offer

His name is 'Yahweh Rapha', 'the LORD who heals'.

- A further lapse into grumbling

Yet despite God's renewing the people, soon they fall into similar unbelief yet again. The people leave Elim and come to the wilderness of Zin^{¶1} (it has nothing to do with the English word 'sin')! They have been travelling for about five weeks^{¶2¶3} and now again they start bitterly complaining against Moses. It involves a rejection of Moses' call. Although it should have been perfectly plain that it was God who had brought them to where they were, they talk as if it is entirely Moses' doing ('you have brought us out into this wilderness'^{¶4}). Again they panic. Again they grumble. Again they attack Moses. Now they glamorise the past and talk as if Egypt were a wonderful place! 'We sat by pots of meat . . . we ate bread to the full'^{¶5}. They were not thinking of days when they sighed because of their bondage and cried out to God for help^{¶6}. Apparently they now regarded Egypt as a good place to be! There are four lessons we must learn.

¶1 16:1
¶2 15:3
¶3 16:1

¶4 16:3

¶5 15:3

¶6 2:23

Four lessons for us

1. Saving faith must become practical faith

1. **Saving faith must become practical faith.** The people were saved by their faith in the blood of the lamb. But now their faith must face practical problems as they travel towards Sinai.

2. Tests will come

2. **It is only a matter of time before something tests our practical faith.** Five weeks after their salvation, the tests began! God came to them and said in effect: 'you believed before but will you believe now? You had faith enough to be saved by the blood of the lamb. Will you have faith enough to face these daily difficulties?'

3. The test of faith consists in the seeming absence of God

3. **The test of faith consists in the seeming absence of God.** At first when the troubles came God did not seem to be there. He was not doing anything. He was waiting. God sometimes seems to hide himself for a while.

4. God wants us to learn not to grumble against him

4. **God wants us to learn not to grumble against Him.** When we are in a crisis we are under test. We are faced with the temptation to lapse into self-pity. We are likely to be looking backwards and to be glamorising the past. But God does not like it. His ways with us are always good and 'in the time of need' He will rescue us in His own way.



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