

THE WILDERNESS JOURNEY
by Pastor Richard H. Jones

II. THE JOURNEY OF THE ISRAELITES FROM THE RED SEA TO MT. SINAI
(Ex. 15:22-19:2; Num. 33:8-15)

A. THE ISRAELITES DEPARTED FROM THE RED SEA, WENT THREE DAYS' JOURNEY PASSING THROUGH THE WILDERNESS OF SHUR, AND THEN INTO THE WILDERNESS OF ETHAM AND ENCAMPED AT MARAH (Ex. 15:22,23; Num. 33:8).

1. Some things about this particular place.

Marah was located by the Red Sea in the wilderness of Etham. Its name means "bitter."

2. The events which took place at Marah.

- a. The Israelites had journeyed three days in the wilderness without water and when they came to Marah they found water but they could not drink it (Ex. 15:23).
- b. Then when the people murmured against Moses, God showed him a tree and he cast it into the waters and they became sweet (Ex. 15:24).
- c. At Marah the Lord tested the Israelites and gave them a conditional promise concerning their health (Ex. 15:25,26). If they would obey His voice He would keep them healthy.

3. Some applications we can make from these events.

- a. First of all, the Israelites who left the place of victory and song may have expected an easy path but it was necessary for them to go through difficulties before they would depend upon God and develop the character which God desired in them.

In a similar manner we, as Christians, should realize that it is only through difficulties that we can develop the character that God desires in us. Therefore, we cannot expect to go through life without facing situations which will drive us to God, mold us into a vessel for service, and conform us more and more to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28,29).

- b. Secondly, the tree which Moses cast into the waters is a type of the cross of Christ. Just as that tree sweetened the waters at Marah and made them potent, so do our bitter experiences become sweetened when we look at them in light of Calvary's tree and what that means for us (Rom. 5:3,4; Rom. 8:18).
- c. Thirdly, we need to note that the Israelites were walking in the path of obedience and in the will of God and yet they were led to suffer for a season. For the same reasons we can expect some times of sufferings although we're walking in the will of God. It is only through suffering that we will be given glory with Christ (Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:10-12). For the Christian we can see then that trials are to educate us and

develop us and not to punish us.

B. NEXT, THE ISRAELITES DEPARTED FROM MARAH AND ENCAMPED AT ELIM (Ex. 15:27; Num. 33:9).

1. Something about this particular place.

At Elim there were 12 wells of water and 70 palm trees. This place is identified as the present Wady Gharandel (Unger's Dictionary, p. 306).

2. Some applications we can make from the blessing of this place.

a. First of all, we find that Elim was a place of relief as well as refreshment. There the Israelites found an abundance of water after their experience in the wilderness and at Marah. There, at Elim, was a well of water for each of the 12 tribes and trees to shade them from the sun's heat. From this account we can gather that God has an Elim for us after we have faced difficult times and have experienced various trials in our lives. When we get to Elim we will find relief and be refreshed.

b. Secondly, Elim also symbolized a place of rejoicing and restoration for the Israelites. They needed physical rest and restoration also for the journey ahead.

So do we need times of physical restoration and rejoicing (Isa. 103:14). We don't know what's ahead for us but we can count upon the fact that God will restore us and give us the strength we need for the journey ahead. Notice how rejoicing and physical restoration are so important (Neh. 8:10; I Kings 19:4-8).

C. THEN, THE ISRAELITES DEPARTED FROM ELIM AND ENCAMPED IN THE WILDERNESS OF SIN (Ex. 16:1; Num. 33:10,11).

1. The events which took place at this encampment (Ex. 16).

a. At this place the Israelites were hungry and so they murmured against Moses and Aaron (Ex. 16:2,3).

b. In response, the Lord gave the Israelites manna from heaven in the morning and quails for meat in the evening (Ex. 16:4-13).

c. God's glory also appeared to them in the pillar of the cloud because of their murmurings (Ex. 16:7,10).

d. There, God also invested special significance to the Sabbath day and tested the Israelites concerning it (Ex. 16:4,14-31).

e. Then Moses was commanded of the Lord to take a pot and fill it with an omer of the manna and to lay it up. Later it would be stored in the Ark of the Covenant for future generations to see (Ex. 16:32-34).

- f. Verse 35 says that God gave the Israelites this manna for 40 years until they came into the land of Canaan.
2. Some applications we can make from these events.
 - a. We should see a certain principle, first of all, in the sin of murmuring. To murmur against God's servants is to murmur against God (Ex. 16:7,8).
 - b. Secondly, we should be aware that God uses things in our lives to test our obedience to Him (Ex. 16:4,19,20). If we obey, it will bring blessings, if we disobey, it will bring adverse consequences. In all of God's laws we should realize that they are given for our blessings because God loves us and desires the best for us.
 - c. Next, we need to see that the manna was a type of Christ. Manna was a miraculous gift of God. It wasn't something man could produce, he could only appropriate it and gather what God had provided. This is what is needful for our salvation (Jn. 6:51-52). Manna is also a type of the written Word of God which reveals Christ who is the Living Word. And this is what is needful to satisfy our souls and sustain us spiritually. We must feast daily upon Christ, the Bread of Life, by meditating on the Word of God. Dr. Charles Stevens said, "Nothing reveals what we really are in our spiritual state so much as our attitude toward the manna." (115)

D. NEXT, THE ISRAELITES DEPARTED FROM THE WILDERNESS OF SIN AND ENCAMPED AT DOPHKAH, THEN ALUSH AND THEN THEY ENCAMPED AT REPHIDIM (EX. 17:1; NUM. 33:12-14).

1. Some things about this particular place.

The name Rephidim means "beds" or "places of rest." The exact location of Rephidim is not known, but it was a camping place located somewhere between Elim and Mt. Sinai.

2. Some events which took place at this encampment.
 - a. It was at Rephidim that the Israelites strove against Moses and Aaron because there was no water. Moses then was instructed to take the elders in Israel and to smite the rock in Horeb with his rod (Ex. 17:1-6).
 - b. Moses then called this place after another name because of the striving of the Israelites with him (Ex. 17:7). Massah means (temptation") and Meribah means "dispute or chiding".
 - c. It was also at Rephidim that the children of Israel had to defend themselves against the Amalekites (Ex. 17:8-16). Moses commanded Joshua to choose men to fight the Amalekites and Aaron and Hur held Moses' hands up while he held the rod of God in his hand.

d. God gave the victory and Moses built an altar, worshipped and called it "Jehovah-Nissi" meaning "The Lord is my banner" (Ex. 17:15,16).

3. Some applications we can make from these events.

a. Firstly, we note that the Israelites were so soon to forget all the great wonders God had done for them. They had witnessed redemption through the blood of the Lamb. They had seen God's power in parting the Red Sea. They had tasted the waters of Marah which God had sweetened. They were eating of God's manna every morning and yet they were now ready to stone Moses and Aaron and questioned God's presence, although the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire was ever present (Ex. 17:7). We, like they, are oftentimes forgetful of what God has done for us when those things ought to make us grateful and more trusting.

b. Secondly, the rock had to be smitten to supply the water the Israelites needed (Ex. 17:6). This rock was a type of Christ who was smitten on the cross of Calvary to supply the water of life for those who believe. From this we can gather that it's not enough to admire Christ or His life or His teachings. It's not enough to follow His example as a man, Christ had to be smitten for us and it is only because of His bearing God's wrath for our sins that we can be saved by faith in Him (II Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53:4,5).

c. Thirdly, we see that the water from the rock is a type of the Holy Spirit which is given to all who believe (Jn. 7:37-39; I Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9). When we received Christ as Saviour we became sons (Jn. 1:12) and because we are sons He has given us of His Spirit (Gal. 4:6). It is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we are shown the things of God and find satisfaction for the thirsting of our souls (I Cor. 2:9-14).

d. Fourthly, we note here that Amalek is a type of "the flesh" or the sin nature which we have to constantly battle. Just as there would be war with Amalek from generation to generation (Ex. 17:16), so will we have conflict with the flesh all the days of our lives.

e. Finally, we note how this battle against Amalek was won. It was through the intercession of Moses on the hill which laid hold of God's power. Just as this gave the Israelites the victory, you and I can be victorious over "the flesh" by prayer and the intercession of Christ who is our Advocate and Intercessor (I Jn. 2:1,2; Heb. 7:25).

E. AFTERWARDS, THE ISRAELITES DEPARTED FROM REPHIDIM AND JOURNEYED TO THE WILDERNESS OF SINAI WHERE THEY ENCAMPED (Ex. 19:1-3; Num. 33:14-16).

1. Some events which occurred at Mt. Sinai.

a. At Sinai the law was given to the Israelites. It contained the ten commandments and various judgments concerning their relationships with one another (Ex. 20:1-23:33).

b. At Sinai Moses was given instructions concerning construction of the Tabernacle. It was then built accordingly and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:34). Instructions were also given concerning the priestly service and the order of worship (Ex. 25:1-31:18; 36:1-40:38).

- c. At Sinai, the first commandment was broken by Aaron and the Israelites while Moses was on the mount with God. This led to judgment and the death of 3,000 men. It was at this time that Moses was so angry he broke the two tables of law given by God and had to receive them again (Ex. 32:1 - 35:35). The Lord was ready to consume the whole nation and make a new nation out of Moses but Moses interceded for them and God withheld His wrath (Ex. 32:7-11, 30-35).
 - d. At Sinai, the Israelites were also instructed concerning the law of the offerings, the feasts to observe (Lev. 1:1-27:34), and the order of the host (Num. 1:1-10:10).
2. Some applications which we can make from these events.
- a. First of all, we notice that God is holy and sinners cannot approach Him without a mediator. In this sense Moses is a type of Christ who is the only mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5). There is no coming before His presence apart from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - b. Secondly, we can gather from the consequences of Israel's idolatry with the golden calf that God judges sinners, and the sentence of the law for sin is death (Rom. 6:23).
 - c. Thirdly, we can see a type of Christ in all the different offerings to make atonement for sins (Heb. 10:1-10).
 - d. Fourthly, we can learn that God is a God of order and He expects us to worship and serve Him according to specific guidelines. It's not a matter of what we feel like doing or whether something works, it's a matter of what God directs us to do. This is certainly illustrated in II Sam. 6:1-15.