

Water and Food in the Desert

Exodus 15:22 - 18:27

Bible Memory Verse

Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Bible Story

This section contains many stories of what happened with the Israelites after the Red Sea incident. Bitter water turned to sweetwater, manna and quail coming from the heavens to provide nourishment, water from the rock on Mount Sinai, the Amalekites defeat with the arms of Moses being held up, and the visit of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law and his advice on management of time, are all stories told in this section. The common thread throughout this narrative is the constant complaining and grumbling of the Israelites.

After they had passed through the Red Sea and seen the Lord deliver them by his great hand, they began to complain after three days because they could not find water suitable to drink. "What are we to drink?" they complained. Moses cried out to the Lord and by throwing a piece of wood into the water it made it sweet to drink. The Lord told them that if they obeyed the voice of the Lord and did what was right in His eyes, then the people would not suffer any of the diseases that were brought upon the Egyptians. They obeyed—for a short while.

When they were in the desert for a while they began to complain again:

"If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Exodus 16:3).

The Lord answered them with manna from heaven that appeared like dew in the morning. The Israelites were to collect what they needed just for the day and on the day before the

Sabbath they were to collect what they needed for two days. If they kept the manna for longer than the time prescribed, then they would be disobeying the Lord. Most of the people paid attention, but alas some did not. Those who kept the bread longer discovered the bread to be full of maggots and smelly. The Lord also sent quail to them from the heavens and they ate their fill.

Furthermore, the water issue came up again: “Give us water to drink,” they said, quarreling with Moses (Exodus 17:2). Moses cried out to the Lord and the Lord provided. Moses was told to strike the rock with the staff and water would come forth. So Moses did this and they were provided for.

Then the issue of an opposing army came up—the Amalekites. They came to attack the Israelites in the desert, but the Lord was against them. Joshua led men into battle while Moses stood on top of a hill overlooking the battlefield. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning (Exodus 17:11). Moses grew tired of holding his hands up, so Aaron and a man named Hur went to the top of the hill and gave Moses a stone to sit on while the two men held up Moses arms for him. Because of this, the Israelites were able to defeat the Amalekites that day.

Then Jethro visits Moses and dispenses some good advice to Moses: stop trying to do all the work yourself and let other people be filled with the spirit of wisdom and discernment and judge alongside of you. Moses realizes that his father-in-law’s wisdom is wise and he follows this advice, thus saving himself a lot of time and energy.

The constant nature of the “grumbling” of the Israelites is a foreshadowing of what is to come. They are fickle. They do not trust the Lord. They easily forget what the Lord has done for them. Later on when Moses gives his final speech to the Israelites, he tells them that he hopes they choose to follow and trust the Lord, but he knows that they will not and he goes on to tell them the consequences of their inevitable action. Not much faith in these people is there? They are very representative of the human race and how fickle we are when it comes to dying to self and trusting the Lord with our lives.

Life Application

The main lesson in this series of stories is that the Lord provides. He is the ultimate provider. He gives us all good gifts and has our lives in his hands. Instead of grumbling and complaining about what we do not have, let us rejoice and be thankful for what we do have. For there are many who do not have as we have.

Less complaining, more praying. Most of our thoughts and actions in life are of a grumbling nature, not a prayerful and thankful nature. Instead of being thankful for what the Lord has given us, we complain and want more. We do not think of thanking our parents for what they do for us, but rather griping about what they do that is seemingly against us. Our line of action should be prayerful thanksgiving instead of spiteful complaining.

Review Questions

1. What was the first thing the Israelites began to complain about after they crossed the Red Sea? They were thirsty and they had no suitable water to drink!
2. What did Moses do to make the water suitable to drink? Threw a piece of wood into it.
3. What did the Israelites complain about the next time? They were starving!
4. What did the LORD God send them for food and what was it like? Manna and was like
5. When and where did the manna show up? In the morning and it was like dew on the ground.
6. What did Moses do to get water from the rock after the Israelites grumbled and complained again of being thirsty? He struck it with his staff and water came out
7. How did the LORD God protect and save the Israelites from the Amalekites? Two men helped keep Moses' hands raised so the Israelites could keep winning

Coloring Sheet

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