

Most of us don't like tests. It is not the actual test that we don't like. We can all type or write, click or fill in a circle with a pencil. No, we dread tests because they reveal reality. They expose what is there or not there. This morning we'll see several tests in Exod 15-17. Let's consider Marah, Manna, and Massah.

I. Marah - 15:22-27 – God has delivered them and judged the Egyptians and they set out. They go three days, which is a very long time with no water and they find some in Marah, which means bitter. They can't drink it. Bitter brackish water. Too much water back at the Red Sea, not enough here at Shur. Hemmed in again. So, the people grumble. This morning we are going to see three stories of grumbling (15:24, 16:2, 17:3).

You know, Western society seems somewhat civilized but we're only about three days of empty shelves away from civil disorder.¹ Remember Covid? Or even if there is an ice storm in the forecast, good luck finding any toilet paper at Sam's. People lose their mind. Israel grumbles but God is gracious.

He provides sweet water with a stick. Again, the Lord provides. Our God's not empty-handed. He tells them this is a test. He'll test them again in the next chapter (16:4, 17:2). The wilderness is training for the people of God. Will they trust or will they grumble?

Dearly beloved, maybe you are in the wilderness right now. Truthfully, we are all in the wilderness. And the Lord may send tests. For our good and his glory. Tests reveal allegiance. When things don't go your way, how do you react? Tests refine faith. 1 Pet 1.6-7: "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." We all know people who walk away from the Lord and more often than not it was a result of some trial in their lives that they did not respond well to. Trials reveal what our faith depends on. They reveal sin and unbelief. They were already there. Like a cholesterol test. No use blaming the doctor. Tests are a spiritual x-ray.

So, lean into the Lord on the hard day. Beg for help to do so. Trust his love and his providence. Remember what William Cowper wrote: "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain; God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain."

Look again at v. **26** First "if." So far, God has just done it all but now they have a part to play. Listen, do, pay attention, keep. Hear and obey. This is why being here, under the faithful teaching of God's Word is so vital for your life. / Listen to God's Word and do it. Kids, isn't that

¹ Chester, 116.

simple. Its not easy, but it is easy to understand. What should we do? Listen to God's Word and do our best to keep it. One commentator writes, "Israel is being summoned to a primary commitment in principle to pay heed to Yahweh's teaching and live accordingly. Covenant obedience is not to be merely a kind of 'tick-box' exercise in compliance with every regulation. It is, first of all, an orientation of life, mind, heart, and will toward their living Savior God, bringing all intentions and behaviors into alignment with his revealed character and will."²

II. Manna (16:1-36) 1-3 Now, Israel is hungry. No food in sight. Need a boy with five loaves and two fish, you know. So they conclude that they would be better off dead. They sound like toddlers. I am going to starve to death in his house. Child its 10am. You just had breakfast an hour ago. They are like, hey at least those Egyptians corpses floating in the sea back there had full stomachs! I'd rather be there. "Lungs filled with salt water beats an empty stomach." They've lost perspective.

Patrick Henry said "Give me liberty or give me death." Israel says, give me slavery or give me death." In effect they say, all that stuff we have seen God do, all that redemption, all those plagues, the Passover and the Exodus – all that just made things worse than they were in Egypt. We miss slavery. / We had meat pots there! I don't know what that is, but it sounds good. Egyptian Brazilian steakhouses. Pharaoh De Chao. All the meat you want. Just raise the Egypt flag. Their memory is skewed by their current scary circumstances. We can do that too. We are on shaky ground so we look back and reach for something more stable. It's what psychologist Terence Mitchell called rosy retrospection. It wasn't that good back then either.

They have such short memories. Back in ch. 2, they grumble about slavery and they grumble about freedom. They just want the hunger pains to end. Phil 3:19: Their god was their belly. Rom 16:18: "For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive." They are driven by their appetites. No self-control. Self-indulgent.

Some people live to eat rather than eat to live. When you turn to food for relief or comfort, your belly has become your god. As you open the fridge or the pantry door, stop and ask – why am I here. What am I hoping this food will do for me that only God can. / AA: play it till the end – after you gorge you know you will just feel crummy. / Hunger is a revealer, which is why its is good to fast on occasion. It is also why the devil tempts Jesus as he is fasting. Matt 4:1: the Spirit led Jesus into the *wilderness*. . . *he was hungry* and the tempter came." You gotta be on guard when you are hungry: HALT.

4-8 Every single time – the Lord will provide. My father has it. He is so patient with his people, but this too is a test. Deut 8:3: "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with

² Wright, 305; If they hear and obey, it will go well with them. God will not put the diseases he put on Egypt on them. After the giving of the Law, there are a bunch of blessings for obedience and a whole bunch more curses for disobedience and in several places, those covenant curses allude to the plagues on Egypt (Deut 28:20-24, 27, 42). Deut 28:60: "And he will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you."

manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, *that he might make you know* that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

They are blaming Moses, and Moses says you have a God problem not a Moses problem. That’s important. When we grumble horizontally, we are really grumbling vertically. Grumbling distorts reality. They wish there had been no Passover. They only remember slavery as good food. They’ve lost their mind.

13-21, 31 So the Lord provides bacon-wrapped quail minus the pork – that’s unkosher - and this flaky bread stuff. This is better than GrubHub. Manna means “what is it?” I like to think it was like Frosted Flakes or Krispy Kreme donut holes, but you know, without the calories. Some liberal theologians deny the miraculous and say this manna was actually just plant mites or insect poop or secretions from the sap of a tamarisk tree rather than bread from heaven. Silliness.

Notice that daily trust was required. God doesn’t give grace today for tomorrow. Some of you worry too much about the future. About all kinds of hypotheticals. Michel de Montaigne: “My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened.” Jesus: “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matt 6:34). You worry you won’t have enough faith to get through such and such a situation. Today, you probably don’t. But in the moment, you will. God gives special grace to his saints at the right time, and often not beforehand.

So Jesus tells us to pray: give us *this* day our daily bread. Heidelberg Catechism 125 on the Lord’s Prayer: Which is the fourth petition? A: “Give us this day our daily bread”; that is, be pleased to provide us with all things necessary for the body, that we may thereby acknowledge thee to be the only fountain of all good, and that neither our care nor industry, nor even thy gifts, can profit us without thy blessing; and therefore that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures, and place it alone in thee.”

He gives what we need for the day. Enough Prov 30:8-9: “give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.” Not scarcity, not surplus but sufficiency.

If you try to cling to the daily manna, it will rot. In other words, if you trust in your own provision rather than the provision of God, it won’t go well. Worms and stank. That’s the way it goes when you try to find life outside of God. Whatever it is that you look to instead of Jesus: relationships, reputation, pleasure, power, stuff, accomplishments, grades, parenting, if you rely on anything other than Jesus it will rot. If career, you’ll retire or be replaced. If youth, you’ll age. If beauty, time sets in. Powers decline. Relationships disappoint. I love that line in the Getty

song *My Worth is Not in What I Own*: “As summer flowers we fade and die, Fame, youth and beauty hurry by.” They hurry by don’t they?

Maybe you saw Wemby’s interview after their first loss in the NBA Finals (big guy for the Spurs). He said, “I want to win so bad its as if my life depended on it.” Well, Wemby’s life, meet Jalen Brunson and Spike Lee. Friend, whatever you seek to build your life on besides Jesus will rot in this life and lead to everlasting damnation. In fact, the way the Lord Jesus Christ describes eternity for those who reject him is a place where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched. Turn to Christ in faith and there will be no rot – in this life or the next.

In verses 22 and following the Lord begins to teach them about the Sabbath. Clearly, they were not aware since the Lord has to tell them about it in preparation for the OC Law that would come at Sinai. The Lord will provide double on the 6th day, but none on the 7th day so they can rest and trust the Lord.

The sabbath was the gift of rest for a people who didn’t know rest. Will they take God’s invitation to trust the Lord the 7th Day? **25-28**. They trust their own efforts and their own provision.

III. Massah (17:1-14) – **1** Ok, here we go. Thirsty again. No problem, right. One would think, they would trust God. **2-3**.

Nope. They’ve seen God work and they forget. You’ve been there though, haven’t you? I have. Worship your heart out on Sunday morning, then have a pity party Monday afternoon? We forget Egypt so quickly. We forget the whips and the bricks and the murder of the baby boys. We view the present as bad and the past good. We can distort reality when we lose perspective. But the Lord keeps providing for his pathetic people:

6-7 Water from the rock. He takes care of his complaining people once again. Grace for the grumblers. But verse 7 is tragic. Reprehensible. Is the Lord among us? Someone needs to grab these toddlers by the cheeks. They were enslaved 400 years. They saw 10 plagues. They saw 100% of the Egyptians defeated. Yes, the Lord is among them.

Ch. 17 ends with the Lord defeating the nomadic tribes descended from Amalek, who was the grandson of Esau (Gen 36:12, 15-16). Up to now, the opposition has mostly been from within. Now from without as well. Remember Gen 3:15? Amalek is of the seed of serpent. There will always be opposition from the seed of the Serpent towards the seed of the woman. First Egyptians now Amalekites. Baptist Pastor John Sutcliff wrote, “Yet all should remember, that there are but two parties in the world, each engaged in opposite causes; the cause of God and of Satan; of holiness and sin; of heaven and hell. The advancement of the one, and the downfall of the other, must appear exceedingly desirable to every real friend of God and man. If such in

some respects entertain different sentiments, and practise distinguishing modes of worship, surely they may unite in the above business.”³

Notice that when there is a lack of trust in God, it leads to disunity and quarreling among the people. Think about that: lack of trust in God leads to quarreling with people. But now, they are united in battle. Ben Franklin: after signing Declaration of Independence: “We must all hang together or assuredly we shall hang separately.” And Israel wins so long as Moses hands are held up by Aaron and Hur. The staff is a signal of divine power and judgment. God provides and protects. Water from the rock, victory in battle.

What does this mean for us? Three ways: we look to the Israel’s negative example, we look to the local church, and we look to Christ. We’re in the wilderness. We have been redeemed, freed from the power of sin, Satan, death and hell. But, we are not yet in the promise land. We are a pilgrim people. This world is not our home. We look back at their bad example. The Apostle Paul will pick up on this passage and tell us to learn from it: **1 Cor 10:1-4**. The rock was Christ! “The Lord liveth and blessed be my Rock And let the God of my salvation be exalted!” The rock was struck and blessing gushed out. And the rock is mentioned at the beginning of their journey and the end (Exod 17:1-17, Num 20:2-13) so was seen as accompanying them along the way! Christ was with them and he was their source of water for life.

5-11 They serve as an example. He mentions 4 ways not to be like them: 1) Do not be idolaters. Worship God alone. Look to him alone. 2) Do not indulge in sexual immorality. Pursue purity. Flee sexual sin. 3) Do not put Christ to the test 4) Do not grumble. Grumbling results from a wrong view of God and a wrong view of self. You think God doesn’t know what he is doing and you think you deserve better. You are entitled to better circumstances, so you think. God takes complaining seriously. The Jewish documents Sirach and Psalms of Solomon described grumbling as living life in opposition to God (Sir 10:25, 46:7, Ps of Sol 5:15, 16:11). Phil 2:14: do all things without grumbling or complaining. The Puritan Thomas Watson said, “Our murmuring is the devil’s music . . . Better to be mute than to murmur.”

2nd, we look to the local church. We need each other to stay on the path and away from grumbling hard hearts. Listen to **Heb 3:7-12, 13-14** We need one another to hold firm to the end.

Third, we look to Christ. The One who split the sea for Israel is the same God who did not spare his own Son and will with him freely give us all things. Stay focused on Christ, the bread of life. **John 6:31-51**. Believe on Jesus. Keep believing. And have your hunger satisfied, thirst quenched, guilt removed.

The God of all grace doesn’t give up on his grumbling people. He provides sweet water from the log, sweet bread from heaven, water from the rock, and victory through the raised staff.

³ John Sutcliff preface to An Humble Attempt vol 2, 279

Benediction: Rev 21:6: “And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.”