

Tested, Trained, and Taught
Exodus 15:22–16:7
April 26, 2026

About a year ago, over a two–week span, three *different* church members told me I should read the same book: *The Count of Monte Cristo*. All three are folks I respect on these matters. And none of them knew I’d been told by the other person(s).

So, about a month ago I started it.¹ Eventually the main character is in a cave. In the darkness of that cave, he’s looking for something quite valuable. And Dumas writes this, “Dantès’ eye, *habituated as it was to darkness*, could pierce even to the remotest angles of the cavern.” As it goes on to describe his search, it does so by repeatedly noting his “quickness of perception” in that cave. And again, that’s because of his eye being “habituated as it was to darkness.”² Now, if you’ve ever read the book, you’ll know *why* his eye was so keen in the darkness of that cavern.

While I may *not* be able to tell you everything that author is doing from a *literary* perspective, I can pinpoint it from a theological one. He’s not *only* reminding the reader of something from the character’s past, he’s *also* implying there was some sort of reason behind it. If we were to call it providence, he’s *interpreting* the events of that person’s life. That is, something in Dantès’ past, even something that was *hard*, produced something in him, and prepared him for something ahead.

We know that difficulty can do that. And we know it’s not *just* difficulty. Consider the best teachers, coaches, or mentors in your life. I’d imagine the best instructors were concerned with *more* than mere information. And the best instruction didn’t teach *merely* to the test. Whatever tests there were, they were given in order to teach, information for the purpose of formation.

In our passage today, the Israelites have *just* been delivered from the Egyptians. They’ve *just* sang praises to their Deliverer. But *now* they are in the wilderness. And in the wilderness, Exodus 15 asserts, they are tested.

1. **Yahweh Tests (15:22–27)**

Verse 22: **Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea.**

I assume you haven’t forgotten what *just* happened. The LORD fought for His people, delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians. As Psalm 136 says it: **He overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, for His lovingkindness is everlasting** (Ps. 136:15). Or as the Song of Moses declared: **I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation** (Ex. 15:1–2).

That *just* happened. Verse 22 continues the journey: **and they went out into the wilderness of Shur**. This particular wilderness was a desert that stretched all the way from Egypt to Palestine.³ They’d walked through the sea on *dry* ground; and that’s the kind of ground they *kept* walking on. Verse 22 goes on: **and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water**.

A good question for *every* stage of the wilderness journey is this: Are they here on purpose? Were they led *here*? 600,000 plus, three days into the dry desert wilderness—no water in sight?

Then, someone spotted an oasis. Right or wrong, I imagine they picked up the pace. However, verse 23: **When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for**

¹ It’s a *large* book; I’m not far at all into it. So, what I tell you is *something* of a spoiler, but not enough to ruin anything.

² Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, 189.

³ Phil Ryken, *Exodus*, 415.

they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. “Marah” means bitter.⁴ Which is all they found to drink, likely a clear liquid containing a good bit of dissolved mineral salts.⁵ Keep in mind: it’s a sauna in the wilderness of Shur. And they couldn’t be refreshed by what was right in front of them. Verse 24: **So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?”**

I remember the first time I went overseas we visited a house church in Central Asia. And a dear friend of South Woods—Zane Pratt—was teaching from Philippians 2—not *exactly* where we were last week, but close to it. And as he was teaching, he said this, “It’s *not* the unclear passages in the Bible that cause me the most issue. It’s the ones *so* clear I can’t escape what they say.” Maybe you can guess what verse he was referencing in Philippians 2. Philippians 2:14: **Do all things without grumbling or disputing.** There’s just not enough ambiguity in that verse, is there?⁶

Of course it’s not *just* clear in Philippians 2. Jude has a thing or two to say about it (Jude 14). As do the Psalms (78; 106), James (5:9), and 1 Corinthians (10:10–11). And the Israelites are the defining example of grumbling throughout the Scriptures. Some of those New Testament texts I just referenced point back to the Hebrews, and say: “Don’t be like *them*.”

By the way, the wilderness journey is here, in part, for *that* reason. In fact, when speaking of the Israelites—even of their grumbling—Paul writes this to the church at Corinth: **with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved** (1 Cor. 10:6).

A delivered people grumbled. They’ll do it multiple times in chapter 16. And to be clear, it’s *quite* understandable that they’d be upset about the lack of water out in the wilderness of Shur. However, *surely* these people knew Yahweh could do a thing or two with water? He’d turned the Nile into blood. They’d *just* walked on the dusty floor of the Sea of Reeds.

We *read* Moses’s response to their grumbling in verse 25: **Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.** Once again, waters that *could* have brought about death for the Hebrews “behave in a manner contrary to their nature and work for Israel’s good.”⁷

We’ve talked about the LORD *leading* the Hebrews—in the pillar of cloud and fire. We’ve talked about the LORD *protecting* them—standing between them and the Egyptian chariots at the Red Sea. And we’ve talked about the LORD *avenging* them—swallowing up their enemies. While all those things remain true, in today’s passage we’re seeing the leading, protecting, and avenging God *provide* for His people.

And in doing so, He’s *establishing* something; and He’s *accomplishing* something. As verse 25 goes on, He *establishes* something: **There He made for them a statute and a regulation.** With those command-like words, He’s making clear that while He *delivered* a people, He delivered them from Pharaoh, *not* from Him.⁸ Though this is pre-Sinai, pre-Ten Commandments, God is already establishing something. In one sense, it’s a preview of Exodus 20. That is, He not *only* directs them via cloud in the sky—the particular *direction* they were to walk—He intends to lead them in the *manner* in which they walk.

But before those commands in Exodus 20, the provision of the LORD in Exodus 16 is intended to foster trust. Not that He hadn’t done plenty *already* to engender the people’s reliance upon Him. But as we’ll see, no matter how they behave, He just *keeps* providing.

⁴ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC, 322.

⁵ Doug Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, 366. I’m not sure what’s worse—no water at all, or water you can stare at but not sip.

⁶ Maybe there’s a loophole in the Greek?

⁷ Enns, 323.

⁸ Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 66.

Because alongside establishing something, He's accomplishing something. Verse 25 ends, **and there He tested them.** This is partly why we began this sermon the way we did. In *this* testing, the emphasis seems to be upon teaching or instruction.⁹ How do we know that? Verse 26: **And He said, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer."**

This test wasn't *simply* to find out what was in their hearts, though it certainly does that. It was *also* to instruct them. He'd led them to a place with no water so that, *there*, He might provide for them. He's not reacting to their need; He's orchestrating it. So that they might trust Him. And so that He might *then* say, "listen to Me." Give earnest heed **to the voice of the LORD your God.** Do what is right **in His sight.** Give ear **to His commandments.** That's the test. And the LORD is clear: to "listen and do" would be to bring about healing.

It was a test given by One they could trust. Verse 27: **Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.**

I was reminded this week of a scene in Lewis's *The Silver Chair*, when Jill comes to a stream to drink. And yet, beside the stream was a particular Lion. On the bank, she heard these words, "If you're thirsty, you may drink." Which, of course, made her frightened in a *different* way. Then, she heard, "Are you not thirsty?" To which she replied, "I'm dying of thirst." So, the Lion said, "Then drink." And then, with some measure of hesitation, she asked, "May I—could I—would you mind going away while I do?" A few moments pass. Then Jill says, "Will you promise not to—do anything to me, if I do come?" And the Lion responded, "I make no promise."

Now let's pick up the scene as Lewis tells it: "I dare not come and drink," said Jill. "Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion. "Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then." "There is no other stream," said the Lion. And then, what is beautifully connected to our text today is what Lewis writes next, "It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion."¹⁰

This is, of course, why we often fail to follow the steps the Lord's laid out, *even* when He's telling us to do what's good for us. We don't follow because we actually don't believe He is who He says He is. We continue to struggle with the deception within, that which repeatedly tells us *we* know better. Meanwhile, we're parched, dying of thirst.

Yahweh has shown Himself to His people. He *continues* to make Himself known. And that includes these tests at Marah.

And it includes the one that's next, continuing this emphasis on the *purpose* of His testing.

2. Yahweh Tests to Teach (16:1–5)

Verse 1: **Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt.**

The timeline is interesting. It's the fifteenth day of the *second* month. You know what happened on the fifteenth day of the *first* month? Exodus 12:51: **The LORD brought the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.**

They've traveled for a month, *exactly*. And they've made it to the **wilderness of Sin**, an interesting name for a spot on the map outside Egypt. I'm not going to push it further than it is.

⁹ Blackburn, 66.

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, 382.

Look at the first three letters of the word Sin—ai.¹¹ The Wilderness of Sin is just a wilderness outside Sinai.

Which will *also* be a place where the Hebrews fail to remember who God is. Maybe this is yet another preview. Verse 2 describes what unfolds in the wilderness of Sin: **The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.**¹²

There is so much we can say about this. But, first, the grumbling seems to be contagious. Though back in chapter 15 it was “the people” that grumbled, in chapter 16 it’s *more* specific, and more *spread* out: **The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled.** We might say that if grumbling’s contagious, there’s almost always a patient zero. And all it takes is a *single* groan, or murmur, to open the floodgates.

And of course, the world loves to make this particular sin an *acceptable* one, even giving grumbling the cover of authenticity—that *unquestioned* virtue. But, of course, in *that* kind of world, we should form a robust doctrine of the heart. And if we do *that* rightly, we would then remind ourselves: “I don’t have to say aloud everything I feel.” And maybe unbridled self-expression is not *actually* a moral imperative.

But in this case, we’re actually given the details of the complaint. Verse 3: **The sons of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the LORD’S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”**

Now, are they overstating the case with how much food they had in Egypt? Not necessarily.¹³ They’d lived in one of the wealthiest places on the planet. And there, they were expected to work—and work hard. I’d imagine they were fed *so that* they might work—and work hard.

“Would that we had died in Egypt!” they say. Maybe you recall that in chapter 14, standing beside the sea, when they saw Pharaoh’s army appear on the horizon, they’d said something quite similar: **Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?** (Ex. 14:11).

So, they’d done this before. God had *heard* them do this before. And what did *He* do then? He split the sea. Knowing who they were, He taught them something about Himself. Here again, knowing their complaint, what does He do? Verse 4: **Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.”** He’s patient; He’s merciful, gracious, slow to anger.

In fact, we might say two sentences sum up the Old Testament narrative: humanity repeatedly shows us who *they* are. And Yahweh shows us who *He* is.

Though they’d not earned *any* of this, He provides. Yet the LORD makes clear that this *too* is a test. Verse 4 continues: **Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them.** And once again this is a test *intended* to teach. Verse 4 ends: **that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in my instruction.**

By the test He’s teaching them, training them to know how they ought to live. We’ll talk about this more *next* week, but verse 5 hints at *how* this test might instruct: **On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.** Why would there be twice as much? Because on the Sabbath, they were not to gather at *all*. So that each week

¹¹ Enns, 324. Both words are similar in Hebrew, too.

¹² I mean, it worked last time, didn’t it?

¹³ Stuart, 371.

they would gather provision in a way that was somewhat counterintuitive, based on what they'd been told.¹⁴

And not just each *week*, but each *day*. That's what verse 4 indicated: **gather a day's portion**. The LORD was testing *and* teaching. And the concept He *kept* on teaching was that He *keeps* on providing.

And, of course, He does not—and cannot—change. Nor do the principles that undergird His instruction. There is little to no question that manna in the wilderness would've been in the minds of the disciples when the One they called Rabbi said, **Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread** (Matt. 6:10–11).

So, do we believe the LORD is the One that provides? Is He trustworthy? Does His instruction sometimes seem counterintuitive? Are we willing to trust His character—revealed to us in His Word and proven to us over and over again? And are we willing to *keep* trusting Him, knowing that He's forming us, teaching us about Himself?

I've said this a number of times, but when our children were babies, they would cry and cry and cry when it was mealtime. I imagine you've experienced this. And I always wanted to ask, "How many meals has your mother forgotten?"

Verse 35 of this chapter will say that God provided manna *every* day for forty years in the wilderness. Every day, in both *what* and *how* the LORD provided, He taught them. And He was training them to know who He was, so that in knowing Him, they might trust Him.

3. Yahweh Tests to Teach them to Trust (16:6–7)

Verse 6: **So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD."**

This should not be unfamiliar. It's just a remix of this book's refrain. God intends to make Himself known. Both at evening, *and* in the morning, the One who brought them out of the land of Egypt, the One that led them by a pillar of cloud *into* the wilderness, would provide for them while they were there.

And speaking of that pillar, Moses ends our passage making plain who it was that led them to Marah, who it was that led them into the wilderness of Sin, and *therefore* who it was they actually complained against. Verse 7b: **for He hears your grumbings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?**

Moses says, in essence, "Do you think *I* split that sea? And did you fail to see the Pillar of Cloud leading us day by day, here and there, and *here*? Your issue is not with me." Which is, of course, true of all grumbling, all discontentment, all murmuring about this or that station in our life.

Conclusion

Israel does as Israel does, even 1500 years later. In John 6, right around Passover, a Man from Nazareth saw a large crowd coming to Him. And then He asked Philip where they would get enough bread for all these people? Then the Apostle John wrote this: **This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do** (John 6:6). Which was, of course, to take a few loaves and feed multitudes with it. Again, He shows who He is.

And guess what the people do? They don't necessarily complain, but they *do* ask for more. And they ask for more because they misunderstand the nature of the gift—and the Giver. So *when*

¹⁴ Stuart, 372.

they ask for a sign, for *another* work, He says this: **Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.”**

John 6:32: He then said to them, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.”** And you know what they said *after* that: **“Lord, always give us this bread.”**

And Jesus of Nazareth, the God-Man sent from heaven, said: **“I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.”**

He is what every one of God’s provisions aims to point you to. He’s the true and better manna—bread that does not perish, nourishment that will never end.

Because He’s not *only* bread from heaven.

He’s bread from heaven, *broken*, that we might live.