

Gavin Orton. 15th February 2009. Exodus 15:22-17:7

Is the Lord among us or not?

Picking up the story...

But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

Exodus 14:29

Read The Song of Moses & Miriam

Moses and Miriam's song demonstrated the new relationship they had with the Lord their God. They had glimpsed the glory of God; they had witnessed his strength, his power, and his majesty. The Pharaoh and his army, previously thought to be the greatest power on the Earth – smitten, dead, washed up on the shores of the Red Sea. The Israelites witnessed the powerlessness of the Egyptians army at the hands of their God. Their God, who had saved, them, brought them out of oppression, slavery. Their God who had heard their cries for help.

And they lived happily ever after...

Or so we'd like to think.

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they travelled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"

Exodus 15: 22-24

Grumbling after just three days of witnessing God save them from the clutches of death at the hands of the Egyptians – parting of the Red Sea

– the time of worship and declaration in their trust in the Lord their God (Moses & Miriam’s Song)... What happened to the:

I will sing to the Lord for he is highly exalted...

...The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him...

...Your right hand, O lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy...

...In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling...

...The Lord will reign for ever and ever.

Ex 15: 1-18

What happened?!?!... The desert

What was it like to be in the desert? We need to understand this. Put yourself in their position.

Fresh memories of life in Egypt, just a few days before, they had jobs, a roof over their heads, money to buy food, water in abundance. Ok they were oppressed but hey, if you did what you were told, you’ll get by, you’ll survive.

Now, they were roaming the desert looking for the most basic of necessities and they were failing at that!

Their frustration, their worry, their anxieties. Had they made the right choice, taken the right path?

They had been walking for about 60 miles in the desert – that’s about the same distance between Birmingham and Oxford... ...only a lot harder!

What about the heat of the desert sun? The coldness of the desert night?

Had God abandoned them? Had God changed his mind – perhaps we weren't the right people, perhaps he got it wrong...

Now here we are, three days of walking, the supplies of water they had brought with them get smaller and smaller, day-by-day. We begin to keep our eyes peeled for any sign of water and we see an oasis in the distance – the reflection off a pool?

Quickly let's use our last bit of energy to get there, if only we can get there, we'll be ok, we'll be able to drink, and we'll be able to rest and stay awhile? We'll be able to decide what to do after?

So they push on, they carry their families and pull their live stock to the distant oasis... ...finally we're going to get some water... ...I'm so thirsty...

Symptoms of dehydration:

The body starts to feel the effects of dehydration just 1-2% of body fluid is lost. If the level of fluid loss increases to 10%, it's often very serious and can be fatal.

Some of the symptoms of dehydration are:

- Dry mouth
- Chapped or dry lips,
- Dry eyes,
- Loose skin with a lack of elasticity,
- Sunken features, particularly the eyes
- Clammy hands and feet,
- Headaches,
- Light-headedness,
- Dizziness,
- Tiredness,
- Confusion and irritability

Dehydration can have an increased impact upon the young and elderly...
...the Israelites were travelling with their children, parents, and grand parents. They needed the water desperately!

So when they see the glimmer of water in the distance they gather all of their energy and head straight for the water.

...only to find when they get there, the water is bitter. The water is undrinkable. There is no water for them... ...surely they will die of thirst – they cannot possibly go on!

Oi, Moses!

“You led us out here. What do we do now? We have no water to drink!”

Can you imagine what Moses was thinking! I’ve got over 600,000 people and their livestock out here in the desert and they’re all complaining to me that there is no water to drink.

The Israelites were not only testing Moses, but more importantly they were testing God. God delivered us from the Egyptians, but can he now provide us with water? Is he still able?

Surely they were also challenging God to prove himself to them? If against all possibilities, he gets us out of this mess, well then maybe we’ll consider believing... ...but until then we will wait to obey him fully.

But this way of thinking is sinful against God.

Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.
Exodus 15: 25

God provides for them the water they desire so much.

Showed Moses the tree. The NIV uses the word ‘piece of wood’ but the Hebrew word is more likely to mean ‘tree’. So Moses took a branch and threw it into the water and it made the water sweet and drinkable. The Israelites were appeased... ...for now.

The test of obedience

But God chose to test his people – to test their obedience to Him.

There the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you." Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

Exodus 15:25-26

Why did God choose to test his people?

Martin: "God got his people out of Egypt, now he was getting Egypt out of His people"

The Israelites had lived for generations under the control of the Egyptians – they were enslaved to the Pharaoh. They had learnt that the hard way, that if they did not obey the Pharaoh – they would be punished. They would be given more work, less help. They would be down trodden and suppressed. If they went against Pharaoh's commands, basically there were in trouble.

Now, God was testing their obedience to Him and Him alone. He wanted to demonstrate that He is a loving God who cares for them – his decrees and laws were not sent as punishments like Pharaoh's, but his laws and decrees were to set them free – to heal them!

God brings his people into situations that call for a strong obedience in Him. He wanted to see that the Israelites obeyed him and his commands – to see whether it was a deep ongoing trust in Him as the Lord God their provider.

God urged them to move on from Mirah... ...What?!?! Move on away from this water – we've just been searching for water in the desert for the last three days and you now want to move us on?!?!...

Fortunately for the Israelites, they chose to obey God and trust in him. They moved on...

Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water. Exodus 15: 22-27

God provides them with a true oasis in the desert – with palm trees and all!

God demonstrated to the Israelites that in obeying God's commands, he will bring them to safety, he will take care for them, he will provide for them.

Elim was about 7 miles south of the area they were previously in. The Israelites couldn't have known what was ahead of them – for all they knew it could have been miles and miles of more sand dunes and dry land. God had a different plan, he knew that a little ahead of them – less than a days journey - was Elim in the Valley Gharandel which was well watered and the home to lush palm trees (the word Elim means 'large trees').

God wanted to give them something better than Marah!

God provided abundantly for their needs.

EXAMPLE: God told me to stay in Birmingham, looking for job, frustrated, was given a job at a small practice in Moseley – very good but not quite right... ..wanted more, God had more in mind for me too! Met Larry at event – God said, "You are going to work with this man." Few months later, chose to send off CV, Syd Danks. Interview first thing Larry said, "You've got the job. How much do you want?" – God provided through obedience.

What areas of your life are you holding back from obeying God? Like the Israelites, are you waiting for God to prove himself first? Are you waiting to see what he comes up with before giving everything over to him? That's the wrong way around! You need to give everything over to God now, obey him now, then he will give you all that you need – a lush oasis could be waiting around the next hill – do you want him to lead you there or are you going to stay at the bitter waters of Marah?

We have a choice!

The Israelites failed to look back just a few days to see what kind of God their God was – he not only saved them from the clutches of the

most powerful nation on the planet of that time, but He utterly destroyed the enemy!

I urge you also to look back at your walk with God to – I can assure you, that where you identify where you obeyed his commands, he provided.

God provides through obedience!

The test of faith

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt.

Exodus 16:1

Surely now, the Israelites were riding on the high of the wave. The Lord there God had not only saved them from the clutches of the Egyptians but He had also guided them to the best watering holes in the desert!...

In the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat round 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 16:2-3

All too quickly, once again, the Israelites were forgetting who the Lord their God was and what he had done for them. So much so, they were now saying that they would have rather died in Egypt, under the hand of the Pharaoh, at least they would have died with a full stomach.

God hears the grumbles of the Israelite community and answers their request – again, God uses his provision to test and strengthen His people. This time not only to increase their obedience to his decrees, but also to increase the faith they place in him:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough of that day. In this way I will test them to see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and

that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” Moses said, “You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evenings and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard you grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.”

Exodus 16:4-8

It’s important to note here, that once again, when the people are grumbling to Moses or Aaron, in reality they are grumbling against the Lord – why isn’t he providing for us?

Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.”

Exodus 16:8

There minds kept shifting from focusing on the God they worshipped to the day-to-day practicalities. Despite God’s presence, they were distracted by their grumbling.

While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked towards the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.

Exodus 16:10

The pillar of cloud had not deserted them – it was still with them, guiding them, leading them to the Promised Land. The same cloud that had led them out of Egypt, the same cloud that came between them and the Egyptians army, the same cloud that protected them whilst they crossed the parted Red Sea. The glory of the Lord had not departed from them, leaving them to starve in the desert! They just needed to look ahead and see that the Lord was still leading them and place their faith in him even more.

The Lord said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’”. That evening Quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning

there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flaks like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them. "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'"

Exodus 16:11-16

Picture of quails... .. alive and cooked!

What about Manna – what is it?

Later on the chapter, it describes manna as being like white coriander seeds which tasted like wafers made from honey (Ex 16:31)

Well, apparently Manna is a natural phenomenon in the Sinai. According to Cassuto who was a biblical boffin in the 19th Century (here's the science!):

...Certain kinds of aphids exude the superfluous sugar they absorb from the trees in the form of drops that dry and become whiteish...
...globules.

This was collected in the morning and ground together and baked to make bread. The omer it refers to is approximately 4 pints worth. It is recorded in rabbinical literature that enough manna fell each day to sustain the Israelites for 2000 years – so it wasn't just a light sprinkling!

Yet despite this quantity, under the heat of the desert sun, it would melt away each day (Ex 16:21). This was the part where the Lord used the manna to test the faith the Israelites placed in him to provide for them because:

Then Moses said to them, "No-one is to keep any of it until morning."
Exodus 16:19

Many of the Israelites didn't particularly like this bit of the deal... ..what if they woke up the next morning and there wasn't any manna and what if the manna never appeared again? What would they give to their

children to eat? How could they survive? Again their faith in God was ebbing away... ..can they trust him? Can they put their faith in him?

However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

Ex 16:20

God had fore warned the Israelites that there would be no manna on the Sabbath – which was the day of rest when none of the Israelites were permitted to do work. As such, God commanded Moses to tell the Israelites to gather twice as much manna the day before the Sabbath in readiness for the following day. God promised that it would not go bad over night.

‘This is what the Lord has commanded: “Tomorrow is to be the day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.” So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. “Eat it today” Moses said, “Because today is a Sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground...

But you guessed it:

...Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no-one is to go out.”

Ex 16:23-30

It is our very nature to be provident – to prepare today what maybe need for tomorrow. Yet the manna that God provided for the Israelites required them to rest on the assurance that God would provide and that they would gather what they required each day. They were to place their faith in God that he would provide manna for them daily.

God continued to provide manna for the Israelites for 40 years – until they reached the borders of Canaan.

It is a fact of the Christian life, that our faith will never remain untested. We can take assurance that in the midst of troubles and trials that may well seem meaningless, there are deep purposes of God at work, and these troubles and trials help to call us to the obedience of faith.

These times also demonstrate the comforting truth of our God of providential care. He foresees our needs, plans ahead for our well being and awaits us to come before him humbling asking him for his hand to move – providing us with solutions and sufficiencies.

What's reassuring in all of this, when situations arise and take us by surprise... ..they never surprise him. Whilst situations catch us unprepared, he is always prepared. Left up to us, the situations would be more than we can bear, but we are not alone – like the cloud in the desert that never departed, always guided, he is with us through the tough times – he led us into them so that we can rest on him, we can have faith in him.

God knew the way he was taking the Israelites. He knew before they even left Egypt that there were going into the desert: that the Israelites would need food – and he provided this for them.

Like the path through the desert that God lead the Israelites, God also has a path for us mapped out. And he walks with us along it!

EXAMPLE: Christiana and training contract. We spent a couple of years writing to all the law practices in the region to try and get her a training contract. Whilst we were doing this I was also studying to become an architect but this was coming to an end. We did everything we could to get a training contract – even offering her to work for free! But no response... ..nothing! We handed it completely over to God and placed our faith in Him that if Christiana were to get a training contract – he would make it happen. Then as my training coming to an end Christiana had heard from one of the firms she had applied to a year or so before. They wanted to give her an interview. Also, another firm were interested and wanted to interview her. She went to the first interview, but hadn't heard anything, then I had my final interview whilst she was

literally having her's at the second firm (I think as she came out, I went into mine)... ..and then God acted. The next day, Christiana was offered two jobs – one was a training contract (with the first firm) the second was a job with the prospect of being offered training contract in the near future. From nothing to abundance, from hunger in the desert to an abundance of food.

We believe there were to reasons – God's timing – he wanted to wait until I'd finished my course before Christiana began her training to get her professional status. First year marriage – no time for each other.

Secondly, He wanted both Christina and I to place our complete faith in him – over the couple of years we were trying to get a training contract ourselves, he was teaching us to have faith in him that he would provide!

God provides through faith!

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Heb 11:1

The test of perseverance

Once again the Israelite had learnt that if they obeyed the decrees and laws of God and placed their complete faith in him, he would provide for their every need.

And so onwards the Israelites travelled to the place the Lord had sent them. This time they moved onto a place called Rephidim:

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, travelling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They came to Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink...

Something is sounding familiar here...

...So they quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moss replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?" But the People were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make

us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”. Then Moses cried out to the Lord, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

Ex 17:1-4

Demonstration of perseverance to through hard times.

God equips us with testimony to help us through these times, so that we don't forget that he is with us and that he will provide for us.

These experiences are to be our encouragement in future difficulties.

Rather than grumbling to Moses and not trusting in God – the Israelites could have retold the story of Marah and the bitter water they found and how the Lord turned it into sweet water so that they could be relieved. And then how he moved them on to an even better oasis of clean pools of water where palm trees offered shade and refuge.

Had they focused on these stories and demonstrations of God's providence, then perhaps they would have persevered on the path that God had place them. Perhaps they could have prayed out to the Lord in thanks giving for the times that he had provided water, manna and quails for them... ..now they were in need again – Lord, hear our prayer, only you can save us, only in you do we depend!...

The Lord answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in you hand the staff with which you stuck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.”

Ex 17: 5-6

If only the people had waited on the Lord, if only they had persevered in their path and trust him

Instead, they gave up – they complained and quarrelled with Moses. Still fresh in the minds of the Israelites were the times in Egypt of clean water whenever they needed for themselves, their families, and their livestock. They gave into the thought of dying in the desert, despite the cloud of God ahead of them, leading them to where God wanted them

to be, they looked to themselves thinking that they had been abandoned.

But God had already prepared the rock at Horeb and the fountain of water that would flow from it at the strike of Moses' staff. It was there waiting for them!

God was leading the Israelites to this place – he would be standing by the rock so that His people would not miss it.

God commanded that Moses take the elders of Israel along with him – these were mostly likely to be the ones who were grumbling and quarrelling with him.

God wanted to further demonstrate to those who lacked obedience, faith and perseverance that he was with them and that he would provide for them.

So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah an Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Ex 17:7

EXAMPLE: First three months at practice – really hard – didn't get on well, didn't look forward to going into work at all "Have I made the right choice? Did I hear God correctly? Perhaps God has changed his mind? Should I go back to the other office?"looked to God to help me – encouraged me to stay based upon what he said "You will work with this man." Stayed and after this things greatly improved – job became everything but a job – enjoyment and fulfilment in all that I did.

Now... "544% Increase in Architects singing on". Summer last year we were approx 18 people, since then we've had to make 3 people redundant, send 2 people to another practice, reduce one persons time down to a 2-day week and everyone else be on a 4-day week.

Previous recession – practice's of 50 down to 2!

What do I do? What does God want me to do? "You will work with this man" – persevere through this time, he will protect me, he will look after

me, he knows what is ahead, he knows my needs. God will provide through perseverance. What's around the next corner? An oasis in the desert? Rock with water? More sand and dunes? I don't know but I know that God does!

We only need to turn on the TV, radio or open the papers to here further news about more job cuts, more financial crisis's, more businesses announcing record profit losses.

The last 10 years is similar to the time the Israelites were in Egypt – they thought they had it good – homes, work, food and water whenever they needed it. We've built up a self-reliance in the things of this world – property, savings, money – we've lived the good life! Or so we thought.

Now we've been moved into the desert – businesses are collapsing, and those that aren't are fragile, homes are being reposed, job cuts are announced daily. The world, which we thought was stable, has turned out to be an Egyptian tale – and has been smitten.

What are we to do in these times?

Are we to do as the Israelites did, try to fend for ourselves, which only leads to grumbling, quarrelling and disputes? No, we are not!

We are to persevere:

God provides through perseverance!

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Jas 1:12

We are to turn to God. We are to obey him, have faith in him and persevere on the path he has given each one of us – He will provide!

Whilst we can look at this situation and see the bad, the depressive and the negative, God looks at this and uses to encourage us, to build us up, to teach us to rely on him and only him.

And this time is not only for God to reveal himself to his people – it is a time to demonstrate his provision to the rest of the world. As God provides for us, we are to tell those around us!

A message for everyone

If you scan forward in Exodus to Chapter 18 where Jethro visits Moses in the Desert.

Moses told his father-in-law about everything the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord saved them.

Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. He said, "Praise be to the Lord... ..Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the other gods... ..Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burn offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.
EX 18:7-12

The news of God's provision was a testimony to Jethro that God was the one true God. On this, he committed his life to God – he offered a sacrifice and became a part of the family of God. He sat with Aaron and the elders of Israel, ate bread with them, and trusted in God.

And so as the Israelites questioned:

"Is the Lord among us or not?"

The answer is simple:

He will never leave you nor forsake you.
Deut 31:6