**BCM Bible Study: October 21/22, 2020**

**Exodus 15-17: Testing in the Desert**

Review last week’s challenge: What did you create as a reminder of God’s faithfulness? How have you seen him be faithful to you this week?

Bitter Water: **Read Exodus 15:22-27**

* What issue does Israel face in the desert and how does God resolve the problem?
* Right after God provides for them, they reach Elim and experience relief. Why is it important that they reach this relief *after* God performs the miracle?
* Look again at 25b-26. The word “test” at the end of v.25 is important and will appear in each of the stories we read tonight. What does the word test typically mean to you? What is the purpose of tests?
  + “While there may be an element of seeking to know Israel’s inclinations, the emphasis falls upon teaching or instruction…The Lord trains Israel to obey in 15:22-27 firstly through establishing trust by reminding her of who he is and what he has done…The Lord tests primarily to instruct…the testing provides Israel the opportunity to know the Lord her God.” (Peter Enns)
  + How does this quote impact the way you understand what is happening in this story?
* What is God trying to instill in the Israelites through this lesson with the bitter water?
  + **Read Hebrews 12:7-12**. How has hardship brought forth a “harvest of righteousness and peace” for you?
  + How has hardship taught you to trust the Lord to give you all that you need?

Manna: **Read Exodus 16:1-21**

* How does God test the Israelites? What is the intended outcome of this testing?
* In training Israel, God teaches them at least three things: trust, obedience, and contentment.

*Trust* - **Read Deuteronomy 8:1-5.** How did God teach Israel to trust him?

* In what parts of your life is it difficult for you to trust God?

*Obedience* **– Read Deuteronomy 8:6-10.**

* What was the basis of Israel’s obedience? (He gives them all they need.)
* The foundation of obedience is grace. God chose his people and provided for them; this is the root of joyful obedience. In what ways do you struggle with obedience? Why do you think this is the case?
* **Read John 6:30-35.** What does it mean that Jesus is the bread of life? What does it mean to “eat” this bread?
* **Read Deuteronomy 4:5-8.** What effect can the church’s obedience to God have on others?

*Contentment* **–** Where do you see discontentment in the Exodus story?

* **Read Philippians 3:17-19, 4:10-13**. Are you characterized more by contentment or discontentment?
* In what parts of your life do you feel discontent? How do you find that this impacts your relationship with God?
* Just as dangerous as discontentment is false contentment. **Read Deuteronomy 8:11-20.**
  + What is the warning in this passage? Have you seen this warning played out in society?
  + When are you tempted to say something like v.17?

**Read Exodus 16:22-36**

* What is the foundation of the Sabbath? (God’s creation. He rested on the 7th day)
* What would the Israelites learn from practicing the Sabbath?
  + They would learn at least three things. First, they would learn to live a life that imitates the Lord. Second, “the Sabbath taught Israel that obedience would not come at her expense.” (Ross Blackburn) Third, they would learn that God would supply for their needs.
  + **Read Mark 2:23-28**. Here Jesus suggests that the Sabbath is *for* us. Do you think of the Sabbath more as something for you or something that is a burden? Why?
* What makes it difficult for you to practice the Sabbath?
  + We often fear that practicing the Sabbath means we won’t get everything done. Is this true for you? What does this thought reveal about your heart and your trust in God?
  + Notice that the Israelites had to *prepare* for the Sabbath. Extra work needed to be done on the sixth day to rest on the seventh. What could this look like for you?

Water from the Rock: **Read Exodus 17:1-7**

* How is the role of testing reversed in this passage? (Israel now tests God)
  + What do you think it looks like to test God?
* Despite the people’s faithlessness, God provides water. Paul uses this imagery in 1 Corinthians: **Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-4.** There is some debate about what this means, but it is safe to say that Jesus always provides for our needs.In the context of 1 Corinthians, this reality served as a warning not to run after idols. In other words, we should trust God to give us what we need and to do what is best. To think otherwise will always leave us looking elsewhere for contentment and fulfillment.
  + What needs (emotional, physical, spiritual, etc.) do you want Jesus to meet right now? Let this be a part of prayer requests for the night.

Challenge: It is critical that we learn to trust God’s provision. One way we can do this is to deprive ourselves of something to lessen our attachment to it and increase our attachment to God. Consider these three options:

1. Fast. See [this site](https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/personal-guide-to-fasting.html) and the related resources.
2. Give something away. (money, possession, time)
3. Practice the Sabbath. Pick a day (Saturday or Sunday) to do no work.

Extra Notes:

* It is interesting that the water at Marah is bitter. This word was used to describe the work of the Israelites (1:14).
* Like the plagues, it is tempting to explain away the miracles in these sections, but we shouldn’t do so. It appears that God wanted to act in this way so that the people would understand that provision comes from Him.
* The twelve and seventy mentioned in 15:27 might indicate the exact number of springs and palms, but it also seems to be an indication of God’s perfect provision.
* The Israelites had cattle, but they would need them in the Promised Land. To eat them would have been detrimental to their future.
* It seems that the Sabbath and some commandments were already known to Israel since it is introduced fairly passively here. At Mt. Sinai, God will introduce the Sabbath anew in order to give it express purpose for the lives of the people.
* The cloud appearing in 16:10 is significant in the same way that is has been throughout Exodus – God is present with his people and protecting them.
* The way manna is described in 16:31-36 is reminiscent of how Canaan is described. It is like a foretaste of the Promised Land.
* God being able to provide in the desert *and* in Egypt would have been surprising to the people. To them, gods had authority in certain lands. By contrast, God will claim that the whole earth is his.
* The rock-striking takes place at Horeb, a foreshadowing of the law-giving there in ch. 20.