

Introduction

1. After hundreds of years of slavery and oppression in Egypt, Israel had just been delivered by Yahweh from the most powerful king and country in the ANE:
 - a. In the previous months, Yahweh had displayed His awesome power and complete sovereignty over Pharaoh and Egypt through a series of signs and wonders the likes of which had never been seen in Egypt
 - b. He turned the Nile to blood, sent plagues of frogs, gnats, and flies, wiped out their livestock, covered the Egyptians with boils, sent hail, locusts, and darkness upon the land, and even killed all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians
 - c. To top it all off, He split the Red Sea so Israel could walk across it on dry ground and then brought the waters back down on top of Pharaoh's entire army and drown them
2. Yahweh had promised Israel that He would not only deliver them from Egypt, but take them to the land of Canaan which He promised to Abraham Isaac, and Jacob:
 - a. The fastest journey from Egypt to Canaan was along the shoreline of the Mediterranean Sea, a route of about 200 miles that would have taken about 10 to 15 days
 - b. However, instead of taking them that way, Yahweh took them the LONG way through the desert wildernesses of Shur, Sin, and Paran, with stops at Mt. Sinai and the land of Midian
 - c. In all, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before Yahweh brought them to Canaan
3. This begs the question, Why didn't Yahweh take them directly to the Promise Land?
 - a. Bible scholar Leland Ryken wrote, "Going through the wilderness was not necessary for Israel's salvation, but it was necessary for Israel's sanctification" (Exodus, p. 414)
 - b. Church Father Clement of Rome wrote that after the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses led Israel by the command of God out into the wilderness "that He might root out the evils which had clung to them by a long-continued familiarity with the customs of the Egyptians"
 - c. In other words, Israel wasn't yet ready to inherit the land Yahweh promised them so He took them into the wilderness to purify and sanctify them and prepare them the day He would lead them into Canaan
 - d. One scholar referred to this as Yahweh taking them from deliverance to dependence
4. We see the beginning of their 40-year trek through the wilderness in chapters 15-17 where Moses recorded three different events:

- a. In each of these events, Israel faced a challenge and immediately grumbled and complained against Moses, Aaron, and Yahweh
 - b. At the same time, however, we see how Yahweh responded with mercy, patience, and provision, revealing to Israel who He is and how their relationship with Him would work
5. Today we're going to look at the first of these three events in Exodus 15:22-27 and I'd like to point out four observations that not only applied to Israel on their journey through the wilderness to the promise land, but might also apply to us on our journey through this life toward our Promise Land, eternity with Jesus

A. Observation #1: On their journey to the Promise Land, Israel complained when they faced challenges (READ 15:22-24)

1. The first challenge Israel faced after leaving the Red Sea was they ran out of water to drink:
 - a. They had traveled from the Red Sea for three days but **"found no water"**
 - b. The lack of drinking water was obviously an issue because the wilderness was a harsh, hot, and dry desert; they needed water to survive!
 - c. In a cruel ironic twist, they finally arrived at a place called Marah with plenty of water, but they couldn't drink it:
 - 1) The word "waters" is plural which suggests multiple springs
 - 2) However, the water of these springs was **"bitter"**—this word is used in a variety of ways but in this case it means that the water was either too foul to drink, or more likely contaminated (desert water is often contaminated with bacteria, viruses, or parasites that can cause severe illness)
 - 3) The region was even named after these bitter springs: **"Marah"** means bitterness
2. In the face of this challenge, Israel **"grumbled at Moses, saying 'What shall we drink?'"**:
 - a. Grumbling refers to complaining in a muttered, bad-tempered, or discontented way, generally directed at someone or something
 - b. Throughout the Exodus, this word is used to refer to not just complaining but open rebellion against Yahweh
 - c. Grumbling was a pattern with Israel:
 - 1) They grumbled against Moses and accused him of taking them out into the desert to die when they saw Pharaoh's army coming after them (Exodus 14:10-12)
 - 2) They grumbled against Moses here when they had no drinking water
 - 3) They grumbled again in 17:3 when they were hungry
 - 4) They grumbled some more in Numbers 14:2 when the spies return from the land and report seeing giants

- 5) They even grumbled when Yahweh killed the wicked Levites who rose up against Moses and Aaron in Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16:41)
3. It's important to remember here that it had only been THREE days since Yahweh supernaturally split the Red Sea and delivered them from their enemies!
 - a. Why would He deliver them from Pharaoh's army only to let them die of thirst three days later in the desert?
 - b. Certainly, if He could command the waters of the Red Sea at His will He could provide water to drink
 - c. But, instead of seeking help from Him they grumbled against Moses
4. Takeaway: when Israel faced challenges on their journey, they grumbled; how often do we grumble and complain when we face challenges on our journey?
 - a. Later in Exodus 16 Moses told the Israelites that their grumbling against him was actually grumbling against God Himself
 - b. That's often the case with us; when we grumble or complain because we're not happy about something, isn't it really a form of grumbling against God?

B. Observation #2: On their journey to the Promise Land, Israel needed to be reminded that Yahweh would provide for their needs (READ 15:25a)

1. After listening to them whine and complain, Moses cried out to Yahweh Who did exactly what He does—He provided for their needs
 - a. He showed Moses a tree and apparently instructed him to throw it into the waters and when he did the waters became “**sweet**”, meaning safe to drink
 - b. Some liberal scholars suggest the tree had some botanical or chemical properties that neutralized the contaminants in the water, but that would take one MASSIVE tree because there were at least 1.5 to 2 million people that needed to drink from the springs
 - c. No, this was a supernatural event intended to remind Israel of Yahweh's supernatural ability to provide for their needs—and this would be critical to their survival for the next 40 years in the wilderness
2. Takeaway: on their journey through the wilderness, Israel needed to be reminded that God would provide for their needs; sometimes we grumble and complain and need to be reminded that God will provide for our needs

C. Observation #3: On their journey to the Promise Land, Israel's faith was tested by Yahweh (READ 15:25a-26)

1. At the end of v. 25 it says, “**and He tested them**”:
 - a. This is something we see Yahweh repeat a number of times throughout the Exodus and Conquest:

- 1) In Exodus 16:4 when He promised Israel manna, He said they could only collect enough each morning for one day and said this was **“so that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My law.”**
 - 2) In Deuteronomy 8:2 He reminded Israel of the ways He tested them in the wilderness, **“to know what was in [their] heart, whether [they] would keep His commandments or not.”**
 - 3) In Judges 2:22 and 3:4 He said that He wouldn’t dispossess the inhabitants of Canaan that were left after Joshua died, **“in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of Yahweh to walk in it as their fathers did, or not.”**
- b. This testing was—and would continue to be—accomplished through the **“statute and regulation”** Yahweh laid out for them in v. 26:
- 1) The phrase **“statute and regulation”** appears to be what’s called a hendiadys (hen-DI-a-diss) where two words are combined to form a single concept:
 - a) The NET captures the idea by translating this as **“He made for them a binding ordinance”**
 - b) This means Yahweh was laying before them a principle regarding how their relationship with Him would work and He describes this in v. 26
 - 2) Essentially, this binding ordinance (or principle) was that if they listened to Him and kept His commandments, He wouldn’t bring upon them the same judgments He brought upon Egypt:
 - a) **“If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God”:** lit. **“if you hear to hear”** implying a genuine, earnest listening that leads to obedience which is spelled out in the next three clauses:
 - **“and do what is right in His sight”:**
 - **“and give ear to His commandments”:**
 - **“and keep all His statutes”**
 - b) **[then] I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.”**
 - The diseases is a reference to the plagues He brought upon Egypt
 - The nature of the IF-THEN statement implies that if they don’t do these things, then He would bring upon them the same fate He did the Egyptians
 - This establishes the principle that those who obey God and His Word experience His blessings, while those who don’t face His correction and judgment

2. Takeaway: Yahweh tested Israel on their journey through the wilderness in order to see if they would talk in His ways; in a similar way, God allows us to be tested to perfect our faith:
 - a. James wrote that God allows us to experience trials and testing because it builds endurance in our faith and leads to us being perfect and complete, lacking nothing (James 1:2-4)
 - b. Peter wrote that when we are distressed by trials it proves our faith so that it might be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus returns (1 Peter 1:6-7)

D. Observation #4: On their Journey to the Promise Land, Israel experienced Yahweh's amazing goodness despite their unworthiness (READ 15:27)

1. What we see here is an example of Yahweh's amazing goodness:
 - a. The exact location of Elim isn't known, but it's traditionally identified today as Wadi Gharandel in the Sinai Peninsula which is a lush river valley with palm trees and ample springs of water
 - b. It's described here as having "**twelve springs of water and seventy date palms**" (e.g. palm trees):
 - c. This was a far cry from the harsh, dry desert where Israel spent the last couple of weeks, and the bitter waters of Marah
2. I refer to this as Yahweh's goodness despite Israel's unworthiness because Israel certainly didn't deserve such a lush oasis:
 - a. They grumbled against Moses (and ultimately Yahweh) when they saw Pharaoh's army bearing down on them
 - b. They grumbled again when they were thirsty
 - c. And...they will continue to grumble, over and over again throughout the Exodus!
 - d. If it were up to us, we might have responded to Israel by letting them die of thirst and hunger in the desert wilderness <grin>, but God not only provided for their needs but went above and beyond by providing a lush oasis with tons of water, vegetation, and shade
3. Takeaway: just as Yahweh was good to Israel despite their unworthiness, He is certainly good to us even though we don't deserve it:
 - a. It started with our salvation because the Bible says, "**God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**" (Romans 5:8)
 - b. His goodness toward us continues today because even though we know better, we still sin...and He still forgives (1 John 1:9): "**if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**"
 - c. Psalm 103:7-11 (READ)