

The Book of Exodus

The Bitter Waters of Marah

Text: Exodus 15:22-27

I. The Murmuring of Israel

(Exodus 15:22-24)

- A. After crossing the Red Sea, the children of Israel travelled into the wilderness of Shur.
 - 1. In Numbers 33:8, it is called the wilderness of Etham – apparently the name of a town in this region.
 - 2. This place is mentioned several times in the OT (Gen. 16:7; 20:1; 25:18; 1 Sam. 15:7; 27:8).
 - 3. It seems to be the name of a large region between Egypt and Canaan, not just a city or village.
- B. During a three-day journey, they had been unable to find any source of water; thus, the supply of water they carried with them had become exhausted.
- C. Arriving at a natural spring of water, they soon were disappointed to learn that it was bitter and not suitable for drinking.
 - 1. The name of the place was called Marah – a word meaning, “Bitter.”
 - 2. It serves as a reminder that there is often bitterness along life’s journey.
- D. Thus, they began to murmur against Moses and to ask, “What shall we drink?”
 - 1. The question is a valid one.
 - 2. However, their attitude was sinful.
 - 3. Instead of complaining, they should have trusted in God’s goodness and mercy.
 - 4. Instead of murmuring against Moses they should have been praying to God.
- E. How quickly they had forgotten the power and provision of God!

II. The Faithfulness of God

(Exodus 15:25-27)

- A. In spite of their complaint and lack of faith, when Moses cried to God, God answered him.
- B. God pointed out to Moses a tree that would make the waters sweet when cast into them.
 - 1. Though natural means were used, God was the source of miraculous power.
 - 2. See also John 9:6-7 and compare to baptism (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5).
- C. God used this as an opportunity of testing and teaching.
 - 1. It was a chance for Israel to prove their faith in God.
 - 2. It was an opportunity for God to teach them about true faith.
 - a. If they would hear and obey
 - b. God would protect and heal
- D. Note that the bitterness was not removed, but transformed into sweetness.
 - 1. They were not miraculously transported from Marah to somewhere else.
 - 2. Instead, God brought sweetness out of a bitter situation.
 - 3. This was accomplished by means of a tree – symbolizing the cross that makes sweet all of this life’s bitterness (Gal. 3:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:24).
- E. Consider that the place of bitterness was only temporary, for God soon led them to Elim – an oasis with 12 wells of water and 70 palm trees.