

# Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

April 26, 2020

## I. Review

A. Review some lessons learned from Israel's experiences in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness.

1. When we look at the circumstances as if they tell the whole story, it often leads to distrust of God, impatience with God, anxiety, fear, discouragement, and despair.
2. Distrust of God – especially in the face of difficult or threatening circumstances – often leads to a victim mentality and projecting doom, which in turn leads to self-pity, anger, criticism of God, damaged relationships, and taking matters into our own hands as we pursue self-serving, worldly wise solutions.
3. To gain a sense of security that we have enough for real or imagined future needs – be it tomorrow or ten years from now – we tend to trust more in such things as insurance, investments, savings, and what we have in the cupboards and freezer than in God – and this to our own hurt.
4. Regardless of what it looks like in the moment, God is present and active in our lives – even when He is using trials, threatening circumstances, testing, and extended times of hardship and suffering to accomplish His purposes in us and in the world.

B. Today, we are going to look at Israel's need for food, how they handled it, and how God responded.

C. Prayer

## II. Needing the necessities of life, grumbling against God, yet still receiving from God what is needed.

A. After leading the Israelites out of Egypt, God led Israel to the Red Sea. From the Red Sea, He led them to the bitter waters of Marah where He made the water drinkable. From Marah, He led them to Elim where there was an abundance of water. From Elim, God led Israel back to the Red Sea, and from there, He led them to the wilderness of Sin – which is where we find our story for today.

1. According to **Exodus 16:1**, Israel had been traveling **1½ months** from the time they left Egypt to the time they camped in the wilderness of Sin.

2. Today's story begins at Israel's encampment in the wilderness of Sin. And according to **Exodus 16:2-3**, it was at their encampment in the wilderness of Sin that the whole congregation of the **sons of Israel** grumbled against Moses and Aaron. [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."
    - a. What the Israelites are saying is that it would have been better for God to have had them die in Egypt where they were well fed and had the comforts of home **than to** lead them to this wilderness area where they were going to starve to death.
    - b. Now remember, they had been forced into the harshest kind of slavery in Egypt, and their sons were being killed at birth. Yet here they are, overlooking the truth about how bad they had it in Egypt because they assumed something worse was about to happen to them – and based on their assumption, Egypt looked pretty good by comparison.
    - c. At this point I want to ask two questions.
      - (1) Have you, like Israel, wished to go back to the life God saved you from when the life He saved you too seems too hard or too threatening to your sense of well-being?
      - (2) How often do you overlook the good you have when your longing for some happiness or pleasure is being denied?
- B. However, from a human perspective, the immediate situation did look dire for the Israelites in the wilderness of Sin.
1. After all, they had been on the road for 45 days.
  2. They had no kitchen cupboards or refrigerators or storerooms to turn to for the food they needed.
  3. They had no fields or vineyards or vegetable gardens ready to be harvested.
  4. There were no lakes or rivers nearby for fishing.
  5. There was no city nearby with a market where they could shop for food – and even if there was, the number of Israelites needing food would probably overwhelm such a market.
  6. And if they ate all the animals they brought with them from Egypt, they'd have no beasts of burden for further travels, and no animals for breeding in order to provide food for the future.

7. In other words, from a human perspective, they were in serious trouble, because they had no obvious means of replenishing their food supply.
- C. My purpose in pointing this out is to acknowledge that this food supply situation looked as dire to them as the water supply situation back at Marah.
1. Yet in spite of what they perceived their situation to be back at Marah, it wasn't what they thought it was, for God was testing them, not setting them up to die of thirst.
  2. As you may recall, the situation back at Marah was not about dying of thirst, but whether they would pass or fail God's test.
    - a. Now I think it is reasonable to assume that by now they knew the Marah situation was only a test.
    - b. Therefore, they had no reason to use Marah as their basis for assuming God would allow them to die of hunger in the wilderness of Sin.
  3. Yet here they are, grumbling and complaining, feeling like a victim, and acting as if God and Moses had once again failed them by leading them into this deadly situation.
  4. And yet, the reality is, their current situation was no more deadly than the situation they faced back at Marah.
- D. Therefore, we read in **Exodus 16:4-12**, that the Lord said to Moses, "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, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.** [5] On the sixth day, [they shall gather] twice as much as they gather daily." [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; [7] and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, **for He hears your grumblings against [Him]**; and what are we, that you grumble against us? [8] This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? **Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD.**" [9] Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.'" [10] It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the

wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. [11] And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [12] "I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; **and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.**'"

1. I want to make the point that running out of food was just a realistic outcome of quickly leaving Egypt, being on the move for 45 days, and ending up in a place where there was no food to gather or purchase.
    - a. In other words, running out of food was neither a test from God nor a failure by God – it was simply a part of daily life that could not be avoided given their circumstances.
    - b. Of course, God could have miraculously kept their store of food filled – like He did with the widow’s flour and oil who used it to feed Elijah, her son, and herself during the famine (**1 Kings 17:8-16**). But He didn’t do that.
    - c. God had another plan for feeding the Israelites.
  2. And just like running out of food was a realistic outcome of Israel’s situation, so being fed manna each morning and quail each evening was a realistic outcome of God being their provider – just as He is your provider and my provider.
    - a. I am not implying that God’s provision of manna and quail was not a miraculous provision – for it was. But what I am saying is that whether miraculous or not, God’s provision of what we need is simply a realistic outcome of trusting in Him to be our provider.
    - b. Jesus said it this way in **Matthew 6:25-26**, “Do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?”
- E. God willingly and lovingly provided food for Israel in this current situation just like He had been providing for them all along the way.
1. However, God turned the provision of food into **a test** by setting the rules about how much they were to gather each day. And the test was to see how well they would obey God’s instructions regarding how much manna they were to gather each morning.

2. Now admittedly, this was like a small, end of the chapter test as opposed to a much bigger end of semester test.
  - a. However, it was a test that would reveal how much they had grown in trusting God, because obeying God is directly related to trusting God.
  - b. The reality is, we readily disobey God whenever and where ever we distrust God. And the proof of this is in the test God set up for Israel regarding how much manna to collect each morning.
  - c. You see, obeying God's instructions about how much manna to collect each morning required **trusting** God to provide enough the next morning and every day thereafter to meet their need for food.
  - d. In other words, obeying God's instructions verified trust in God as their provider, whereas disobeying God's instructions verified distrust of God as their provider. And the same is true for us.
3. Now you may be wondering why God would test how much they had grown in trusting Him.
  - a. After all, they had only seen God's power, provision, and protection for a few months, beginning with the ten plagues, plundering the Egyptians while leaving Egypt, crossing the Red Sea on dry land, watching the Egyptian army destroyed in the Red Sea, and having God turn the bitter waters of Marah into sweet water so they could drink it.
  - b. However, based on that list, I think we could all agree that though it had only been a few months, what the Israelites had experienced was enough to build a level of faith that was strong enough to be tested in order to determine how much faith they had and what they would do with it.
4. One of the lessons we can learn from this part of the story is that not all of God's tests are big tests. Some are small tests, yet even His small tests are significant – and here are two reasons why.
  - a. **First**, passing or failing the small tests is an indication of how well we will do on the larger tests. Jesus put it this way in **Luke 16:10**, "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing (*because of unbelief*) is unrighteous also in much."
  - b. **Second**, passing smaller tests not only prepares us to pass larger tests, it also brings rewards from God. Jesus points this out in His parable about the king who entrusted his servants with his money. We read the king's words in **Luke 19:17**, "Well

done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.”

- c. Therefore, make it your aim to prepare for the small tests that come your way day in and day out, for it is as you pass these smaller tests that you incrementally grow in faith and so are prepared to pass the bigger, far more challenging tests. And should you fail a test, use that failure to see where you need to grow and what you need to do to be better prepared for the next test – be it big or small.
- F. Returning to our story, I want us to look at God’s view of His people when we grumble, complain, and find fault with those we blame for the troubles, hardships, suffering, and situations that threaten our sense of security and well-being.
1. There is no doubt that the situation the Israelites found themselves in appeared dire. In addition, there was nothing they could do – humanly speaking – to change their situation. They needed help, and God is the only one capable of helping in a situation like this.
    - a. So though they were directing their frustration and anger, their grumbling and complaining toward Moses and Aaron, they were really taking it out on God. **And God made it very clear that this is what they were doing.**
    - b. You see, Moses and Aaron couldn’t do any more for them in this situation than they could do for themselves.
    - c. And as for leading them to the wilderness of Sin, Moses and Aaron were merely servants of God doing the bidding of God. They were not the ones making the decisions, God was.
    - d. Therefore, it was God who brought them there, and only God has the ability to supply enough food to feed them.
  2. We may not find ourselves in a situation exactly like the one in this story, but we may find ourselves in situations that God led us into, and those situations may contain threatening or disappointing or discouraging circumstances that are beyond our control.
    - a. Therefore, we cannot take our frustration and anger out on the people around us or blame certain individuals for getting us into such a threatening situation without directing all this toward God.
    - b. And in the same way, when we grumble and complain in situations like this, we are grumbling against God and complaining about God.

- G. Now it is true, God was clearly unhappy with the Israelites' distrust of Him – as revealed in their grumbling, complaining, and blaming. And yet, God was patiently and graciously tolerant.
1. Rather than chastisement, God fed them.
  2. And rather than punishing them, He tested them – and in testing them He gave them the opportunity to see how far they had come in trusting Him, how far they needed to go, and what they needed to do in order to make progress in living a life of faith.
  3. This is the mercy and grace of God – for as David says in **Psalm 103:8-10,13-14**, “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. [9] He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. [10] He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.[13] Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. [14] For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.”

### III. Conclusion

- A. As we can see from this story, we humans have the weakness of distrust, a distrust that is most often directed at God. This is to our shame and our own hurt – for in our distrust, we not only dishonor and find fault with God, we needlessly hurt the people around us and bring added troubles into our own lives.
- B. But there is another weakness we humans have that is just as destructive. And that weakness is **either to** presume upon God's grace – as if it is owed to us, **or to** take it for granted as if it is always there regardless of how we act. This weakness is also to our shame and our own hurt. And we will look at that part of our humanness and God's response in another story about Israel on their way to the Promised Land.
- C. Finally, my encouragement to you is to spend more time looking at what God has done and is doing than looking at what He hasn't done and isn't doing.