

The Life of Moses

Moses and the Well of Marah

Exodus 15: 23-27

Chapter 9

Chapter 9

MOSES AND THE WELL MARAH

“And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee. And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.”

(Exodus 15: 23 – 27)

As we continue in our study in the life of Moses I would like for us to once again go to the fifteenth chapter of Exodus for our text. You may remember in our last lesson we examined the great miracle of God as He led the children of Israel across the Red Sea on dry land. We also looked at the great rejoicing of Moses and the people as they realized just what God had done. He had delivered them from their bondage in Egypt. He had led them across the Red Sea when they were about to be

destroyed by the army of Pharaoh. When they were followed across the sea by Pharaoh the people of God saw the walls of water that were God's of protection to them become the means of death for the chariots of Pharaoh. The first part of chapter fifteen is the thrilling outpouring of praise from Moses to God for His deliverance. Then we see Miriam, Moses' sister, as she also leads the people in praise to God for all that He has done. It was a wonderful day of victory that the people remembered for generations. Unfortunately, we can not live on the mountain top. The excitement and the thrill of great victory is wonderful but we must still face trials and tests every day. After such a victory the people probably thought that there would not be any more problems, but there were more problems.

They began their journey through the wilderness and after three days their supply of water had been consumed. In this arid part of the world there was very little water to be found. They found what they thought would be the answer to their problem. It was the well at a place called Marah. However, it was bitter and could not be drunk. This meant that the people were literally looking death in the face. Their reaction was very human and very predictable. It was, however, not a reaction in faith. The reaction of the people was to murmur and complain. Notice that the people murmured against Moses. Our study today will be to look at how Moses, the man of God, handled this crisis and what he and the people learned about how God loves, tests and provides for his people.

The people of God had just seen God deliver them from an enemy by parting the waters of a great ocean and letting them walk across on dry ground. They had seen those same waters swallow the army that would have destroyed them. Why did they begin to murmur when they began to have a shortage of something that was essential to their very lives? Did they think that God would do all that for them and then let them die in the desert of thirst? Could he who divided the waters not send them water in the desert? Surely, He could. Sometimes we as believers think that God is only interested in the big and important aspects of our lives. We see times of disease come and we go to our knees and expect God to deliver us from death. Yet, when we have a little trouble paying a bill we murmur and complain that God has forgotten us and does not care. We think that He has left us on our own to suffer in this world without His provision. Surely, God can provide anything that we need. If He does not see fit to answer our request right away what should we think? Certainly, He has not forgotten us. Why would He save us, forgive our sins, make a home in Heaven for us and then abandon us to the mundane problems of life? If God does not give us what we expect then we should conclude that he has something more important to teach us or to accomplish through the trial that we are facing. Some times we think of God as a jeannie in a bottle. We take Him out and He grants our wishes and makes our lives better. God is more interested in changing us into His image through the trial of our faith than He is in changing the

circumstances of our trial. That is a hard lesson for us to learn because it makes more sense from our standpoint to simply answer our need. God is always accomplishing more through us than we will ever know in this life. God had revealed Himself to the Children of Israel and now He is teaching them lessons about His character. He is trying to teach them that they may always rest in Him and be secure. Without the Marah experiences we would soon begin to feel self-sufficient and have no need of God in our lives except in emergencies. Marah experiences are intended to help us walk more closely to God. A Marah experience in our lives is where God brings us to a point where we have only Him to trust and to look to. There is no one else that can help us. Our own strength is insufficient to meet the need of the moment. We are cast upon God completely and can do no more than watch Him work out the problem in His own way. Fortunately, Moses had learned what to do.

Notice first of all that Moses took the problem to God. *“And the people murmured against Moses, saying, what shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD.”* The people came to Moses and accused him of leading them into the desert to let them die. They were attacking Moses. Moses brought the problem to the Lord. He did not take it personally. For people in leadership positions this is sometimes a hard thing to do. They are accused of improper leadership. Their motives, character, and ability to lead are all impugned. How can a person not take that kind of attack personally? The problem must be viewed from a higher plain. The leader

must see himself as a servant of God. He must do what he believes God wants him to do to the best of his ability. When the people complain against the leader and he is faithfully, sincerely following God, the people are in reality complaining against God. The leader must pass the burden on up to God. He is much better able to bear that burden. It is important to listen to the criticism and evaluate what truth there may be in it, but ultimately it is in the hand of God and He can deal with it much better than we can. When we allow ourselves to get involved personally it changes the problem to a person to person discussion and personalities will make the problem worse.

Not only did Moses not take the criticism personally he took the problem immediately to God. He did not try to fix the problem. He did not try to reason with the people. He saw the problem as a real threat, just as the people did. He understood their concerns and worries. He knew that he could not meet those concerns and could not solve the matter himself. He did the only thing that he could do. He took it to God and sought His help. God is honored when we bring our burdens to Him right away. When we do we acknowledge that we can do nothing and that we need His help. God honored Moses' cry for help by showing him the answer. Scripture says, "*And the LORD shewed him a tree.*" God showed him what the answer would be. God had already prepared the tree for His people. God wanted Moses to have the tree placed in the water and when he did the waters became drinkable. The waters in the well were somehow impure. There has

been speculation as to just what the tree did to clean the water. We may never know the answer to that. I do not think that the kind of tree or the way the tree was positioned is important. I think that God did a miracle when He saw the obedience of His children. It was not so much the tree that changed the waters as much as the action of God when he saw the people obey His command. God was giving the people a wonderful object lesson. God can change the bitterness of this life to sweetness if only we will obey His Word. When His people obeyed they learned that He did care for them and would not let them die in the wilderness. God sometimes deals with us in this manner as well. When we come to a time of bitterness in our lives God can and will send deliverance if we will obey and trust Him. Obedience will always produce sweetness in our lives. The Lord may allow the bitterness to remain for a time but He will answer our need in the way He deems best for us. He expects obedience and faithfulness.

Anytime I see a tree mentioned in the Scripture it reminds me of another tree that we read about in the New Testament. I Peter 2:24 tell us about the tree on which the Lord Jesus hung. *“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.”* Nothing can sweeten the Marah experiences of our lives like remembering the tree that our Lord hung on for us. How can we complain when we realize what our salvation cost the Lord? His love should remind us of His sweetness and lead us to more righteous living. God used the

experience at the bitter well to teach His people obedience. He had already shown them His ability to deliver them, to protect them and to provide for them. Now He is challenging them. He is saying, “Now you know me. Now keep my commandments.” With the privilege of knowledge comes the responsibility of obedience. Verse twenty-five tells us that through this experience, *“he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them.”* He wanted them to learn not to rebel against His leadership. He wanted them to avoid the diseases of Egypt. He gives them in verse twenty-six four stipulations and promises.

He says:

- 1) *“If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and*
- 2) *wilt do that which is right in his sight, and*
- 3) *wilt give ear to his commandments,*
- 4) *and keep all his statutes,*

I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.”

He is saying that in obedience to God there is safety. If we gave it a little thought we would realize that many of the bad things that happen to us in life could be avoided if we would be obedient to the commands of God that we find in the Bible. The disease of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases would not be a problem if we obeyed God’s commandments on morality. If we were to love God properly and others in His power, how

much of this world's strife and pain could be avoided. Child of God the lesson to be learned is that in obedience there is sweetness. Disobedience always brings pain and heartaches. He tells us to hearken to His voice. This means that we should listen whenever we hear the Word of God read. We should listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We should listen to the voice of the spiritual authority that He has placed over us. That would be our pastors and the leaders of our churches. We should listen to the voice of the believers as they testify of the lessons that God has taught them in the trials of their lives. When God speaks to us we must listen with an eye to obedience. God tells us in verse twenty-six to do only those things that are right in His sight. That means just what it says. Do the right thing. That may not always be the convenient thing, or the popular thing. We are to walk honestly. We are to be faithful in church. We are to be moral and to avoid the things of this world that would not lead us to the Father. We are to do the right thing. We are often guilty of doing the thing that feels good. We must do the right thing.

Next, He tells us that we are to keep His commandments. Later God would give the Ten Commandments. That is a good place for us to start. However, Jesus took that a step farther for those who would follow Him. In John 14:14 chapter we read, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* Again in verse twenty-one we read, *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of*

my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”

God taught His people a powerful lesson there at the well of Marah. The well was bitter and He made it sweet for them. Still, it was a very difficult trial for them. It is interesting that just after that trial God gave His people rest from their difficulties. Verse twenty-seven tells us that after the bitter waters of Marah God led His people to the well-watered Oases of Elim. *“And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.”* Often God sends blessing just when His children need it. Our Heavenly Father knows just how much we can take. He is interested in developing our spiritual muscle. He knows that we often need those times of rest as well. In this we see His love clearly displayed. He let the people go to Elim. There was water and shade and nourishment. This was a time for the people to reflect on what he had taught them. It was a time to prepare for what was to come next.

Are you now in a place of bitterness? God has brought you to where you are to teach you of His grace. Don't let Satan make you grumble and be discontent. Look to the comfort of God's Word to find your peace during this time. I am sure that God has the refreshing wells of Elim just ahead. Remain obedient and faithful and I know God will see you through. Being a child of God is not a guarantee that things will always be easy. It does, however mean that we do not have to go through the hard

times alone. God promises us that He will go with us through these bitter times.

To aid our learning:

1. In the crises Moses finds himself in at Marah, how did God show his love for the people?
2. How do Marah experiences help us to not become self-sufficient?
3. What experience has caused you to experience bitterness and how did you fight the bitterness?
4. What knowledge about Himself has the Lord given you that changed your life?
5. Right now are you in a Marah or Elim experience in you life?