

The Provision of God

Exodus 15:22-17:7

Introduction

Recap: We're back in **Exodus** (if you missed the first 15 chapters, we covered them before the Summer and you can catch up on YouTube, Spotify, or Apple Podcasts). The short recap: Israel finds themselves in Egypt because of famine, but times change and rulers change, and the new leaders of Egypt begin to exploit and enslave Israel, to the point of genocide. God sees the wickedness of the ruler of Egypt (Pharaoh) and righteously judges Egypt and delivers Israel.

- The great miracle of deliverance involved YHWH parting the Red Sea so his people could cross over on dry land. It's the foundational picture of **salvation** in the OT. The people pass through the waters of judgment and emerge a new nation, a new people (i.e., the firstborn son of God).

More to the Story: Why doesn't the story end there? Why doesn't our story end after our salvation? In the next three stories we learn a lot about the journey of following God. We learn about his provision, what it means to trust, and the tension of living between our salvation and our glorification, the already/not yet of the Christian life. **In salvation we are liberated, in discipleship we are transformed.**

- A lot of us have been through traumatic experiences. It's important to acknowledge these challenges. But our culture has a way of **dehumanizing** and **defining** us by our victimhood (e.g., divorced/divorcee, abused/victim/survivor, etc.). There is a tension between honoring the pain you experience and moving forward. God wants to heal the brokenness around you and in you and ultimately transform you!
- Imagine a man who grows up with parents who are impossible to please, they are harsh with their words, unforgiving with their expectations. He develops anxiety and perfectionism, never able to rest and celebrate his accomplishments. He comes to understand the gospel, that he is accepted fully in Christ, there is nothing he must do to earn God's love. Great! Does that mean at work on Wednesday the anxiety and perfectionism are magically gone? Maybe they are supernaturally removed or greatly diminished. But most likely, they still persist (hopefully to a lesser degree).
- Imagine a woman who has been in a series of abusive relationships, where she has been used and neglected. On the one hand she has become distrusting of relationships and on the other she still displays unhealthy behavior seeking the love she never received. She comes to understand the gospel, that Christ loves her, provides for her, and will never let her down. Does that mean that the negative behavior patterns and unhealthy relational temptations magically evaporate? Not necessarily.
 - **It's one thing for God to get the people out of slavery, it's another for him to get the slavery out of the people.** The first is a **miraculous moment**, the second is a **lifelong process**.

1. Provision in the Wilderness: Bitter Water (15:22-27)

^{15:22} Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. ²⁴ And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" ²⁵ And he cried to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, ²⁶ saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer." ²⁷ Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

Wilderness: They're still humming the worship song from their Red Sea deliverance. The tambourines haven't stopped rattling and Moses has them marching. **The goal is not just freedom from slavery but life with God.** We are not only freed from the penalty of sin but the power of sin. **How does God do it?** He often uses the wilderness (10x in this section). The wilderness becomes the laboratory for sanctification, where the truths of the gospel go from our heads to our hearts.

- The wilderness becomes the crucible that refines us. It's a painful process (e.g., surgery) that leads to our flourishing. Few of us learn any way but the hard way.
- "Trust is [rarely] automatic, and God [doesn't] expect it to be. He patiently works on Israel's behalf until they see he is worthy of their confidence. God's guidance and protection of the Israelites cultivate their trust in him... The wilderness is his classroom. He has work to do in the Israelites that can only be done in a state of dislocation [and disturbance]" (Imes).

Expectations: Expectations are a killer (e.g., study in college, marriage is hard). The Israelites didn't expect the wilderness. We don't expect suffering. We become prisoners of our expectations. The story of Israel, the prophets, our very Savior, his apostles, and the church should remind us that suffering is the norm.

- The beautiful opportunity is to find joy in the wilderness.

Bitter Water: The problem is simple, they have traveled three days and now their in the dessert with no water. Actually, no *drinkable* water. They are surrounded by water but it is bitter (Marah, cf. Naomi, Ruth 1:20). It's like being stranded at sea, surrounded by water but none of it is drinkable.

- We know how important water is ("drink some water" is my solution for everything; tummy ache, fatigue, amputation).
- The disappointment is palpable. There is an extra dose of bitterness coming off the great triumph of the Exodus.
 - Against the backdrop of great triumph (Mt of Transfiguration, back down to grumbling people, Moses and the calf
 - Surrounded by water but the water's not good

Test: God led them to bitter water to test them. Rather than smite them, he listens to their complaints and teaches them a lesson.

- He can provide for them. He can heal them. He can lead them. If not, they'll end up just like the Egyptians.
 - Reversal of the Nile: the sweet water of the Nile was made undrinkable by the wood of Moses' staff, now the bitter water of the desert is made sweet by the wood Moses throws in.
- Obey God and learn to see that his way, even in the wilderness is sweet. His rules and commands are life, not death.

Pouty People: I like to give the Israelites a hard time (e.g., pouty people). They're probably better than us (in our best moments baptists are Bible, missions, and gospel people (and maybe potlucks); in our worst we're grumblers).

- They were excited for freedom but were unprepared for life in the wilderness (e.g., a flood is coming you have 45 minutes to grab what matters). Now you have toddlers and elderly in the desert with only what you can carry. #giveemabreak

Springs of Elim: I wonder if they were embarrassed when they doubted. They go a little further to Elim and find a veritable **resort** in the desert. A spring for each tribe (12) and what must seem like a forest of 70 trees (symbolically full).

- Just beyond the place of testing (a test they failed by the way), we see the continued gracious provision of God.

⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matt 7:9-11).

- God is not just a Father but he is a perfect father and, therefore, only gives his children good things.
- In his kingdom all our needs are met.
 - He gives us what we *need* not what we *want*. He gives us "good things" not all things. Our salvation, our adoption, and eternal redemption are the greatest of "good things."
- The promise is true, God gives his children good things and he wants them to ask for provision, to seek his kingdom, and to keep knocking at his door.
- If God has promised to give us "good things" when we ask, we must consider it possible that our understanding of good and God's is different.
 - If God gave us *everything* we ask, we would be God.
 - God won't give a stone if a child asks for bread but what if a child asks for a stone? A good father still won't give that. God gives good things, *only good things*.
 - God knows what is for your good and will give you that.
- God will provide, God will heal, God will restore. In his way and his time. We have to learn to trust.

Already and Not Yet: We live in the wilderness between the Exodus and the Zion, baptism and promised land. We have been saved but await the life God promised. As we wander in the wilderness it's easy to want to stop before we make it. God not only wants to deliver you but take you to the final destination.

2. Process of Trust: Bread from Heaven (16:1-36)

^{16:1} They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ² And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³ and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

From Wilderness to Wilderness: They go from the Wilderness of Shur to the Wilderness of Sin (etymologically related to "Sinai").

- They didn't pass the first test at Shur, will they pass the test at Sin? No.

Forgetful: The reason it's so easy to get mad at the Israelites is that they are **forgetful** and **dramatic**.

- It took three days after the Red Sea miracle for them to forget the power and provision of God and think he couldn't give them water.
- Now it's been a month since the Red Sea and a little less since the Marah miracle and they act like God can't do it again (e.g., Passover was the new calendar year).
 - Whether water or food, they have an amazing skill to forget God's power and provision. Kids: I'm starving; I'm so hungry. I fed you breakfast and lunch, I'll feed you dinner. I fed you yesterday and every day of your life. You eat before I do.

Dramatic: "You've brought us to the wilderness to starve us to death." Do you think God has brought you all this way just to let you die?.

- **Painting Pictures of Egypt.** "I know the genocide and slavery wasn't great, but the breadsticks were so good." What are you saying? Psychologists call this "**rosy retrospection**" or "**euphoric recall**" (**romanticizing the past**). They're selectively choosing to remember on the pleasures and none of the adversity, only the benefits and none of the consequences.
- Hunger makes me act crazy (i.e., hangry), but this is a bridge too far.
- "Sin makes us stupid." Sin makes us think delusional thoughts, that what was harmful was actually good (toxic relationships, addiction cycles, etc.).

Grumble: If the Israelites had a vision statement or values; if you described the *ethos* or DNA of their congregation, it would have to include "grumbling." **Quick to grumble.** "All grumbling is

grumbling against the Lord” (Wilkin). God knows everything, sees everything, there are no interruptions or detours in his economy.

- I am quick to grumble. I forget God’s past faithfulness and focus on the difficult circumstances I’ve found myself (e.g., adoption provision, money to RH, friendships, salvation, etc.).
 - Has God brought me to Philadelphia to kill me, to let me fail, to let us perish? He’s been an amazing provider. We’ve seen his grace. What if we let the past faithfulness of God shape our current attitude and future hope?

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to 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 they will walk in my law or not. ⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?” ⁸ And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.” ⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’” ¹⁰ And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹ And the LORD said to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’” ¹³ In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’” ¹⁷ And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. ¹⁸ But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. ¹⁹ And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.” ²⁰ But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. ²¹ Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted. ²² On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³ he said to them, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’” ²⁴ So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. ²⁵ Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. ²⁶ Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which

is a Sabbath, there will be none.”²⁷ On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.²⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?”²⁹ See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.”³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.³¹ Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.³² Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’”³³ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations.”³⁴ As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept.³⁵ The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.³⁶ (An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.)

God’s Gracious Response: They grumble and complain but God, in his grace, still provides. He gives them bread from heaven (“manna”, i.e., Heb. “whatchamacallit”) and quail (“posh chickens” Gordon Ramsey).

- God graciously provides even though they grumble. Wouldn’t it be better to receive his provision with trust rather than complaints?

Teach: His provision is meant to teach them to **trust** and **obey** him

- **(1) Trust.** They collect the manna daily (i.e., “daily bread”; strength for “today”; “Don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble”, Matt 6:34). They have to trust that God will provide each day. Each day is a new test of trust.
 - If you gather too much it spoils. Some food needs to spoil so we’ll learn to trust God and not ourselves. Our feelings are not God, our comforts are not God, our five-year plan is not God: God is God.
 - **We don’t coast on past blessings but trust God for present provision.**
 - Some of your wells need to dry up (e.g., relationship, job, etc.), so you learn that God is the true source of your life.
 - He is testing them like a father not a professor. He is lovingly teaching and preparing them so they can succeed.
 - There’s no way they can trust God in the big things if they can’t be faithful in the small things.
 - The wilderness is the place where comfort goes away. We lose the things we **think** we need so we learn that God is who we **really** need.
 - “Faced with life’s problems, we say we have no answers. However, the Bible is full of answers – the only problem is they are not the answers we want” (Motyer *adapted*).
 - We want our miracle, not God’s.
 - Repent and turn from sin or just fix my problem (e.g., marriage, finances, etc.)

- Am I a servant of God or is he my servant? Am I living for my comfort or his glory?
- **(2) Obey.** God provides, but you still have to *walk* in faith and go get it. It doesn't magic show up in your belly. Collecting manna is an opportunity to walk in daily trust and obedience.
 - Every bite is a reminder of God's provision (e.g., every time I get paid). 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"¹

Failed the Test: ²⁰ But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. ²¹ Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted. When you disobey God, "it stank." Even in these practical moments, we are reminded to store our treasure in heaven, not on earth.

- What bread are we really working for? It's pointing to Jesus. ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven... ³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst... ⁴¹ [But they] grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven" (Jn 6:31-32, 41).

Clarity: ¹⁰ And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud

- Will we go forward toward God (even in the wilderness) or turn back toward Egypt?
- Don't judge your circumstance by your stomach (your stomach isn't God). The best circumstance without God is death and the worst circumstance with God is life.

Gift of Trust: Trust is the prerequisite for salvation but also the pattern for our entire lives. You never know God is all you need until God is all you have. God is giving them the gift of learning that he is better than everything else. What you think he is withholding, he is giving. The hard times teach us lessons we won't learn any other way (e.g., humility at NRBC 2014, trust planting in pandemic, etc.).

3. God on Trial: Water from the Rock (17:1-7)

^{17:1} All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why

¹ Bullpen: (1) collected additional to share with others; community project. (2) 1 omer = .3 gal. (3) Ark of the Covenant had 10 commandments (law), staff of Aaron (priesthood), jar of manna (provision).

did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go."⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"²

Same Song and Dance: The most consistent thing in these passages besides the Lord's gracious provision is the people's grumbling (e.g., God's patience, lit. "longsuffering"). The escalating repetition of Israel's behavior only heightens the problem. At Marah they had bitter water, at Rephidim, they had **no** water. At Marah and the Wilderness of Sin they grumble, at Rephidim they grumble and **quarrel**.

- They still have not learned to trust God.

Legal: The term **quarrel** is a legal term. They are putting Moses and, by extension, God on trial.

- They **demand** water (entitled rather than trusting).
- They **accuse** him of trying to kill them (again) but this time to the point of harming Moses (They are almost ready to stone me.).
 - You can sense Moses' frustration: "What shall I do with this people? *One of the difficulties of leadership is that the sins, apathies, and hurts of others often unfairly get directed at you.

In My Place:⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink."

- God stands between Moses and the people. God goes on trial before the Israelites. He doesn't have to. He doesn't deserve it. But he does it.
- ¹ For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,³ and all ate the same spiritual food,⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:1-5).
 - The rock is Christ. Moses lifts the staff of the judgment of God and strikes the rock. The staff of God's justice is raised and brought down on Christ. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). We are guilty, yet he stood condemned in our place.
 - Out of the rock come streams of living water. #hallelujah
 - ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom 8:31-32).

² Cf. Num 20:2-13

Passed the Test: Think back to Jesus' ministry. He was baptized (Red Sea) and went into the wilderness and was tested. But where Israel failed the test, Jesus passed. He perfectly obeyed. And his righteousness becomes our righteousness when we place our faith in him. He substitutes himself on our behalf.

Conclusion:

- Trust and obedience rather than entitlement and grumbling. We can patiently enduring the wilderness and loving trust the guidance of God.
 - We can trust that he'll feed us in the desert because he led us through the sea (he will care for us in our everyday lives because he gave his own life to save us).
- Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ **do not harden your hearts**, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, ⁹ when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. ¹⁰ For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." ¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest" (Ps 95:7-11).³
 - Thick skin and soft heart. "God, give me thick skin and a soft heart. Make me tough and tender. Make me tough so I can handle life, tender so I can love people" (Patrick *adapted*).

³ Heb 3-4