

JANUARY 27

Exodus 15-18

You will remember that there are seven events between the departure from Egypt and the arrival at Sinai that are important enough for us to note: 1) the appearance of the Shekinah Glory to guide Israel; 2) the parting of the Red Sea; 3) and the cleansing of the bitter waters at Marah which we began reading about today.

Water made sweet, protected from diseases - Jehovah Rapha - names of God

Now this incident seems absolutely incredible to me. I hope you noticed that Moses says it was a three-day journey from the Red Sea to Marah. That's seventy-two hours before Marah they saw - every last one of them - all 2,000,000 of them - the greatest miracle in the history of the world to their time. Before that they had watched plague after plague fall upon Egypt and experienced God's great protection and deliverance. It only took a 72-hour march for them to start grumbling against Moses! How could they forget so quickly the provisions God had made for them? How could they forget the miracles? The pillar of cloud and fire was still leading them

Event #4 occurred in the Desert of Sin -- (that's not an ethical description, it's a geographical place.)

Manna was the supernatural bread that God provided each and every day until 40 years later when they crossed the Jordan. The word Manna means, "What is it?" - a logical question, I am sure, given the way in which it made its first appearance. The manna, like so many other objects and events from the exodus period, is a 'type' or symbol of Christ. In John chapter 6, Jesus calls Himself the "manna" or "bread from heaven." Just as manna provided nourishment for Israel, so Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, satisfies the hunger of His people.

Now, you should not think that the Israelites ate only manna for 40 years. Even here there are quail to supplement the diet of God's people. We know that they had sheep and cattle coming out of Egypt (12:38; 17:3) and that they still had them many years later in Edom (Numbers 20:19). From Deuteronomy 2, we know that sometimes they bought food and water. We also know that wheat and meats are sometimes mentioned in these books relating to the wilderness period.

There is one last thing to be seen in Exodus 16. It is here that we see the first mention of the Sabbath. In the instructions relating to the collection of manna, God sets up regulations regarding the preservation of the Sabbath. As far as we can tell, before this time, Israel knew nothing about the Sabbath. Unless there was an oral tradition of creation that kept the concept before the people of God until Moses wrote the Book of Genesis, the Israelites would have had no prior understanding of this idea. The word Sabbath means "rest," and from the instructions laid out in this passage regarding the gathering of food, it is quite obvious that God was serious about the Israelites observing that day of rest.

Now, in chapter 17, we come to event #5 - The water at Rephidim. This time there is no water at all and what is the response of the people? They quarrel with Moses and their anger is fierce enough that Moses fears for his very life. He's afraid that they might stone him. Now, we know from other Scriptures that there were some instigators traveling with the children of Israel, and some of them were not even Israelites. But to think that anyone at all would listen to them at this point in Israel's history is absolutely incredible. But there it is. What more would God have to do to convince this crew? How could they not just rest in quiet faith, trusting God and Moses to deal with each new challenge?!

Another thing I want you to see about the Rephidim incident is that the instrument of the miracle was once again the staff or the rod of Moses...the plagues in Egypt - the Red Sea - and now the rock at Rephidim. Remember it was just a stick of wood in Moses' hand; just an ordinary thing that he'd had for many years before he gave it to God.

The last thing about Rephidim that you need to be alerted to is that this rock, which yielded the water of life when struck by the rod of Moses, is made by the New Testament to be a 'type' of Christ. Jesus said of himself "I am living water." (in other words healthy, running water). He also said that whoever believes in him would have streams of living water that would flow from him. This miraculous flow of living water is a picture that will remind us of Jesus when he shows up in John 4.

The sixth event of note between Egypt and Sinai was the battle with the descendants of Esau, the Amalekites. Moses will stand on the hill with the ever-present staff in His hand. Oh, by the way, did you notice that Moses called it the "staff of God"? That's the first time that change of status has actually been noted, but it's a great explanation of what has happened to that plain old stick of wood. It has somehow been part of an ownership change. Now it belongs to God. Anyway, as long as Moses keeps his arm and God's staff in the air, the battle goes to Israel. If he wavers, the Amalekites start to win. Not much strategy there, but the lesson is clear enough. Israel has to fight, but it is God and God alone who gives the victory. I'm not sure Israel fully learned the lesson that day, but one Israelite in particular did.

His name was Joshua, the son of Nun, and this is the very first time we meet him. It will be nearly 40 years before he steps into the limelight as Moses' successor, but he is already in training. You need to see this, because you need to understand that God believes in mentors and apprentices. If you're going to be trained to lead a nation, then go live with Moses, and for almost 40 years, that is just what Joshua did! Intercessors on the hill and soldiers in the battle - that also paints a picture worth studying...

When Jehovah wins the battle, Moses builds an altar of thanksgiving and remembrance. God has won some wonderful battles on our behalf - where are our spiritual altars of thanksgiving and remembrance?

There is another name of God here. We've already noted it – Jehovah-Nissi - the 'Lord our Banner'. This is where that name originates. What does it mean? It means that He is our banner, the banner that we fly as we march into battle.

After the battle, God says to Moses, *"Write this down so no one forgets it. Put it in a scroll and make sure Joshua reads it."* Telling Moses to make sure that Joshua reads it is a hint, some 40 years beforehand, that God has already picked the next leader of His people Israel. So now He's training him.

Our time is gone, but the last event (#7), between Egypt and Sinai, is the visit of Moses father-in-law, Jethro, who solves the biggest problem Moses has (and by the way, the biggest problem that nearly every church still has). It is the problem of how to deliver primary pastoral care. God sent Jethro to Moses to solve it, and he did so by suggesting that Moses train leaders to deliver primary pastoral care to units as small as ten people.

I want you to know that right now, for us, this is one of the very most important chapters in the whole Bible, because it contains the solutions to one of the biggest challenges that we face. One of the key reasons that we have journey groups in our church is to deliver wisdom, community, and pastoral care to everyone who needs it. Without this kind of a system, care would be impossible. And as a side note, the church needs some of you to become Journey Group Leaders, primary pastoral care givers to up to ten others of the family of God. This system was God's solution for Israel, and it will work for us as well!!

Contact Dave Irwin or another pastor at the church if this is something you sense God leading you toward.

This is Mark Ashton, reminding you that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Peace.