

Exodus 15:22-27

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-15/exodus-1522-27/>

Verses 22-27 is the first account of a larger section of Exodus describing the three-month journey (19:1) from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai (15:22 – 18:27). This passage contains the Israelites' first encounter with life in the wilderness.

After three days of traveling in an area that had no water, they came to a place called Marah that had water, but it was undrinkable. The people became angry and confronted Moses about this problem. Moses in turn cried out to the LORD who miraculously provided sweet drinking water for all the people. This problem, which was a test from the LORD, resulted in a statute that required the people to depend on the LORD for their needs. Failure to believe that the LORD could and would provide for all their needs would result in physical suffering through disease.

After an unknown amount of time, *Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur*, which is located in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula. It is important to observe that the LORD through Moses “led” the Israelites into the wilderness. The wilderness is not a comfortable place to be. As such, it sets the stage for the testing of the people.

Having departed the Red Sea, the Israelites *went three days in the wilderness and found no water*. The “three days” recalls the “three days’ journey” that Moses asked of Pharaoh during the plagues (3:18, 5:3, 8:27). Moses wanted to go “three days” into to the wilderness in order to worship. Instead, *they came to Marah*. The word “Marah” means “bitterness” and it used three times in this verse to communicate not only the condition of the water but also the condition of the attitude of the people. The problem they faced was that *they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah*. Marah has been associated with the current-day Ain Hawarah.

Deprived of sources of water, *the people grumbled at Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?”* The word “grumbled” is stronger than simple complaining. It is used throughout the exodus account to refer to open rebellion against the LORD. They were questioning His ability to deliver and provide. This is amazing in light of what they experienced just a few days earlier at the Red Sea. They failed to see that if a sovereign, omnipotent God can part the

waters to deliver His people from Egypt, He can provide drinking water for His people in the wilderness.

During the plagues, Moses wanted to go a three-day journey to worship the LORD. Now, they were three days out of Egypt and, instead of worshipping, they complained. They knew that the LORD was their Deliverer. But could He also be their Provider in a hostile world? To them at this time, the answer appeared to be “no.” They could have gone to the LORD with their needs, believing that He would provide. But instead, they “grumbled,” complaining that being in the wilderness was a bad idea.

Verses 25-26 contain the LORD’s response to the grumbling of the Israelites. After being confronted by the people, Moses *cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet.* It is worth noting the difference between Moses and the people. Moses asked for help. The people blamed and complained. The word translated “showed” is the verb form of the word *torah*, which is the Hebrew word for “law.” Also, there was nothing magical about the tree. It was a visible demonstration of the LORD being able to change the natural world to provide for the needs of His people.

The LORD’s provision here is an amazing act of grace to His unbelieving people. He could have judged them severely, but instead He met their needs without them having to labor for it. God answered the intercession of Moses by directing him to throw a tree into the brackish waters of Marah.

There was a stipulation that went along with this gracious provision. The LORD required something from His people. To express this requirement, *He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them.* The phrase “a statute and regulation” probably means “a binding ordinance.”

The content of the statute was conditional. *He said, “If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians;”* The people of Israel were required to do four things:

- “*give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God.*” The phrase “give earnest heed” is intense in the Hebrew. It is from the Hebrew *shamah* (“to hear”) and could be translated “diligently obey.”

This involves listening to what the LORD says in order to understand it and obey it.

- “*do what is right in His sight.*” Listening and obeying the word of the LORD should result in doing what is right, the LORD Himself being the standard.
- “*give ear to His commandments.*” This also involves more than just listening. It includes active obedience to what is heard.
- “*keep all His statutes.*” The Hebrew word for “statues” is related to the verb “to inscribe” or “to engrave.” It is used to refer to the laws of nature ([Psalms 148:6](#) concerning the stars; [Job 28:26](#) concerning the rain; [Proverbs 8:29](#) concerning the sea). It can refer to a rule or prescription

If these four requirements were followed, the LORD promised that He would put *none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians*. The exact nature of the “diseases” is not specified, but it is reasonable to assume that the ailments would be similar to those suffered by the Egyptians during the plagues (boils, etc.).

The LORD then says that the reason that they can escape the diseases is because He, *the Lord, am your healer*. The LORD said that He was the healer of the people at a time when the waters of Marah needed to be “healed.” Not only did they need water, they needed to be healed physically. The means to that physical healing came through spiritual healing of obedience. They had witnessed the LORD’s miraculous provision for their needs. This was proof positive that the LORD was not only their Deliverer but also their Provider. To this point, God had provided for their well being unilaterally. It was now time for them to play a part in their well being.

After the testing at Marah, *they came to Elim*. Elim was located about seven miles south of Marah, in what is now known as the Valley of Gharandel. This means that they did not have to go far to find even more potable water. It apparently was a pleasant place to be, because *there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters*. In light of what they had just experienced, Elim must have seemed like a paradise.

To sum up, this passage is a vivid account of the LORD’s people who, having just been delivered through the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, started to rebel against their Deliverer. They doubted His goodness by leading them into the wilderness. They doubted His love because they were running out of water, and the lack of water would have caused a slow and painful death.

Such grumbling has been a part of God's people for a long time. It becomes a major theme during the Exodus. The people grumble when they are in physical need of something, and the LORD provides for them, usually through a miracle that everyone witnesses. They will test God ten times ([Numbers 14:22](#)). This might be a literal ten times, or a figure of speech that means "many times." It doesn't tell us which testing counts as the first, but grumbling seems to be the primary thing that tests God. But this passage focuses on God testing them by giving them something to do, a responsibility to discharge, in order to receive a blessing.

Even in the New Testament, Paul warns against Christians grumbling against the LORD ([I Corinthians 10:10-11](#)). The Corinthians lived in a city filled with centers of mystical cults. There is little doubt that the Christians in Corinth experienced hostility from both these cults and from the Roman Empire as well. Yet Paul told them not to grumble. The LORD could deliver and provide in the midst of their spiritual wilderness.

Each believer should expect the LORD to lead them into a "wilderness" that we might learn to trust Him. That we might learn to embrace responsibility, and come to know Him by faith. The wilderness is neither fun nor comfortable. But it shows us our inadequacy and reveals the quality (or lack thereof) of our faith. If we allow it, it will also show that our LORD is completely capable of meeting our needs. He wants us to believe in Him and obey Him, because He is worthy.

Biblical Text:

²² Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. ²⁴ So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" ²⁵ Then he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw *it* into the waters, and the waters became sweet.

There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. ²⁶ And He said, "If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer."

²⁷ Then they came to Elim where there *were* twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.