

Trouble Follows

Exodus 15:22-27; 16:1-4

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I. From One Place vs. 15:22-27

a. Wilderness

- i. Wilderness- Land that is basically wild, nonarable, and sparsely inhabited or unfit for permanent settlement. It may be desert, mountains, forest, or marsh. In the Near East the wilderness is characteristically dry, desolate, and mostly rock and sand. It is rough, uneven, and interlaced with dry watercourses. The wilderness is not completely barren but provides seasonal pasture for flocks, depending on the former and latter rains

1. They traveled into this desert three days. They evidently do not cross the Sinai Peninsula using this route. The theological burden of the text conveys not primarily the location of the wilderness of Shur but Israel's response. Its purpose is to report Israel's reaction of unbelief and lack of faith, demonstrated by their murmuring against Moses

ii. Three Days

1. No water
 2. The process that he puts into place gives some further insight into why he has brought his people this way—not only to avoid the Via Maris or Way of Horus. He has a positive purpose; he would test his people and strengthen their commitment and trust in him. They will learn his ways and his laws and his character in the wilderness, away from the strong influences of the cultural centers of the day.
 3. From a human point of view, it is entirely understandable that the Israelites would have begun to worry about water by the third day without finding any. They and their animals probably had consumed nearly all the water they had carried with them in skins, and it is not inconceivable that as they approached Marah in expectation of being able to drink all they wanted, many of them drank their last water and/or gave it to the animals.
 4. After the first great victory came the first big test. The Israelites did not pass it easily. When circumstances seemed threatening, they quickly forgot the significance of the deliverances they had recently experienced (ten plagues and the drowning of the Egyptians at the sea) and complained. God used the occasion of their complaining to test them and teach them about trusting him enough to obey him and thus enjoy his benefits
- iii. Marah- The usual interpretation is that the water was brackish, i.e., salty source of water, but the water undrinkable

1. Accordingly, finding foul water at Marah was not merely a disappointment but a cause of panic. “Bitter” water (*mārāh* means “bitter” in Hb.) is often clear so that it looks potable but in fact contains large percentages of dissolved mineral salts that render it undrinkable.
 2. Water is of course a matter of life and death, nowhere more so than in the dehydrating heat of the desert. The anxiety of the people would of course have been mounting by the hour, and the false relief brought by arrival at a place where there was water unfit to drink would have sharpened that anxiety dramatically
- b. Grumbled 1 Corinthians 10:10
- i. Grumble- to waver to the point rebuke, murmur against; has the character of open and plaintive rebellion against a person
 1. with the intention of undermining this person. It belongs to the genre and situation of pre-judicial dispute, which nevertheless presses toward an official, judicial clarification. Although the etymology of the term is unclear, its meaning is certain: “to rebel against someone.” The customary translation “to murmur” seems too weak.
 2. The rebellion is grounded in a total misinterpretation of liberation as ruin and aims at its reversal
 1. It acknowledges Yahweh and his representatives as bringers of ruin instead of as deliverers. The term *lûn* consequently discloses at the center of OT theology a type of sin in which God’s people as a whole rejects the liberation effected by him and thereby its own redemptive future in the dangers of the interim (wilderness), between liberation (exodus) and fulfillment (conquest) out of blindness and impatience, misunderstanding its God
 2. murmuring theme” in the wilderness (16:2, 7–9, 12; 17:3; Num 14:2, 27, 29; 16:41; 17:5, 10; cf. Deut 1:27; Josh 9:18; Psa 106:25). The theme, however, began even earlier in Egypt, by the Israelites’ own admission (Exod 14:12), and continued at the edge of the wilderness in Egypt (14:2). Of course, this “murmuring” occurs after the deliverance of the Israelites at the Reed Sea and their subsequent trust in Yahweh and his servant Moses.
 3. Their sin manifested itself rather in their *attitude*, which is suggested in the statement at the beginning of v. 24, “So the people grumble against Moses.” Moses was, of course, God’s human representative among them and a likely target for blame. What is noteworthy, however, is that the people were following the pillar of cloud and therefore knew perfectly well that it was Yahweh who had led them to this location. But since Moses was the Lord’s spokesman, they expected the answer to their complaint to come from him. The people did not have what they had expected and failed to trust God to provide it.

4. The “murmuring” theme begun in Egypt continues (Exod 14:11–12), and Yahweh offers his solution to the problems. The trials of this journey through the wilderness of Sin reveal major flaws in the faith of the people. This time they complain for food to avoid a famine. The earlier complaint for water and a later complaint (17:1–3) for water, arranged in a triad, emphasize that water and food, the necessities of physical life, are the things that Israel *should not* be concerned about
- c. Moses Cried Out
 - i. Moses – Cried
 1. Cried - to **shout** (for help, for deliverance): —a cry intended to be heard
 - a. *****The difference between grumbling and complaining...***
 - ii. The Lord Showed Him a Tree
 1. Water’s became sweet
 - a. it was a supernatural, not a natural event; a miracle, not a prescientific application of a natural remedy Rather, Moses’ faith in being willing to do what God commanded him, without understanding why or how it would work, is what is implicitly commended here.
- d. Tested
 - i. Statutes - rule regulation, is a prescribed, required, preset obligation or due
 - ii. Regulations – establish justice, divinely guided judgment or case-decision that gave direction to life in covenant with Yahweh
 1. In other words, the testing was already past—it was the leading of the people to a place where the water was no good. The statute/rule [NIV “decree ... law”] would immediately follow as the content of v. 26.
 - iii. Tested
 1. Tested- Often God tests people in order to determine their intentions. Such testing by God, however, was not without intent. It was to refine the character of man that he might walk more closely in God’s ways
 - a. In the garden of Eden, Yahweh tested his people; here, in a desert, he begins again with his new people. If they will follow his life-giving words, they can enter a new “garden of Eden.” This time of testing is echoed in the wilderness testing of Jesus in the NT (Luke 4). Israel will learn, unfortunately, that they cannot keep his commands and that the covenant and the words bestowed on them are available only by God’s grace (Exod 32–34); Yahweh’s character will be revealed as gracious and compassionate (34:5–7).
 2. Earnest Heed
 3. Voice of the Lord Your God

- a. This first ordinance foreshadows what is to come at Sinai, where his voice (קוֹל) and word (דְּבַר) will become dominant. It is echoed in Deut 32:46–47. The principle is clarified; Yahweh instructs his people to “obey his voice, do the right thing, from his perspective, listen intently to his commandments (מִצְוֹת) and keep his ordinances”—thus they will show faith in his goodness toward them. His words of instruction from the beginning benefit and guide his people to health and safety.
 - 4. Do what is right in His sight
 - 5. Give ear to His commandments
 - a. called for was loyalty and obedience: loyalty in the sense of a willingness to pay close attention to what God’s will was and to want above all else to please him by doing what he thinks is right
 - b. obedience by not failing to “pay attention to all his commands and keep all his decrees”
 - 6. Keep statutes - guard, keep, observe,” even “follow
 - a. They are to take his requirement and his guidance seriously, pay close and committed attention to his voice, adopt *his* standard as the measure of what is right, obey *his* commands and meet *his* requirements.
- iv. I will
 - 1. No diseases- The promise here was not that Yahweh would never allow those who place their faith in him to get sick. It was that the Israelites would be free from having to worry about the plagues. God averred that he would not become angry at them in such a way as to subject them to the miseries he had subjected the Egyptians to—if they were indeed loyal and obedient
 - 2. I am your healer

II. To The Next vs. 16:1-4

- a. Wilderness
 - i. Time - Moses by this notation brings the reader to the awareness that exactly one month had passed since the exodus began. Moses’ calendrical record keeping here is parallel to that already seen in 12:51.
 - ii. Israel has settled into a routine. The newness of freedom has worn off, and the hardship of wilderness life has set in, and so the people complain against their leaders.
 - iii. The report of the movement of “the whole company of the sons of Israel” from the pleasant oasis of Elim into the wilderness of Sin is, like other such references in the narrative of Exodus, an attempt to locate and plot the route of Israel in exodus from Egypt to Sinai, and eventually from Sinai to Canaan. multiplication of two preparatory themes: Israel’s

grumbling and Yahweh's authoritative statement of his response to their complaint.

b. Grumbled

i. Whole Congregation- **national, legal and cultic communities**

1. Assembly of people, particularly for religious purposes. The Bible describes Israel as the congregation of the Lord because it was a covenant nation. The whole nation was considered to be the people of God
2. Again, grumbling took place, and Moses noted that "the whole community" took part, suggesting that the problem of not enough food to eat had been building steadily rather than having come about suddenly and that everyone was affected to some degree, perhaps most of them seriously
3. Against Moses and Aaron - In Num 11, no direct address is made, though Moses of course must hear the complaint. In each instance, however, the complaint functions ultimately as a complaint against Yahweh and a wish that the exodus from Egypt had never been made, even to the extent that it might have been prevented by an early death in Egypt).

ii. Would rather have died

1. Past - Egypt- This was the first time the Israelites made the "if only we had died in Egypt argument," but it would not be the last (see Num 11:4, 18; 14:2; cf. 20:3; Josh 7:7). Their reference to dying "by the LORD's hand" recalls the plagues and the destruction of the Egyptians at the sea—they had been spared from all of those dangers but were now rhetorically arguing that perhaps they would have been better off eliminated by a plague or by drowning.
2. False - We had food
 - a. They claimed that they had in Egypt "all the food" they wanted, which probably was an exaggeration, but not necessarily baseless. Nothing in the prior account of the Israelite suffering under Egyptian oppression suggested a lack of food. The "pots of meat" they sat around had been real, if not always a daily experience, since the Israelites, as small and large cattle farmers originally and right up through the time of the exodus, were routinely in a position to have meat to eat—perhaps considerably more than the average Egyptian
 - b. This point can be taken a step further still. The hungry complaint of the absence of food in the wilderness, heightened by an all-too-human exaggeration of the diet in Egypt, and reported with an almost humorous irony ("settled life," "plenty of meat," "bread till we were stuffed") is revealingly parallel to the panicky complaint of 14:11–12 that graves were in good supply in Egypt, verses that also serve to anticipate a miraculous intervention of Yahweh (see

Comment above). There is another parallel in the elaborate description of the delicacies of an Egyptian menu in the complaint against manna in Num 11:4–6. That passage too is oriented toward the miracle to come, the provision of abundant meat by the flocks of quail.

- c. I will
 - i. Rain bread
 - 1. From heaven
 - ii. Gather a Day's Portion
 - 1. not just a means of getting enough of the food they were used to but something far better: "bread from heaven." Moreover, God was teaching them a concept: that he was their ultimate provider, the one who from heaven gave them not necessarily what they expected but what they really needed. Thus, his satisfying them with the bread of heaven becomes a theme of Scripture that not only refers to the manna described in this account (cf. Ps 105:40; Neh 9:15) but to the ultimate provision of eternal sustenance, Christ himself (John 6:31–58).
 - 2. Now they were being asked to restrain their natural tendency to gather as much as was available to gather in anticipation of the time when no gathering would be possible. God was teaching them to trust him every day afresh, and they were challenged to think about his provision in a way that had never before been part of their planning pattern
 - 3. Not only are the Israelites to gather the miracle-bread daily in the morning for six days of the week, they are to pick up only a day's supply on any given day, including the sixth day. Yahweh who provides the bread will provide also for the need of the day of non-harvest. They are to collect no more on the sixth day; what they gather on that day will turn out to be two days' supply when it is prepared for consumption
- d. Tested
 - i. Walk- behave
 - 1. It should be translated "so that I can test them to see whether or not they will walk by my law." In other words, the people's willingness to obey the manna-gathering law (*tôrāh*) would show God whether or not they would be inclined to keep his covenant law (*tôrāh*) as revealed at Mount Sinai
 - ii. in my instruction- reference to instruction issued by God
 - iii. Came Elim- Both seventy and twelve are sometimes used symbolically (cf. 1:5 and commentary) for all of Israel in the OT, and the supply of water was enough to meet the needs of the people in this test of faith. The twelve springs and seventy palm trees, if not literal, are still significant and indicate a sufficient stand of trees and water in the area.