

Lesson 22 ISRAEL SUSTAINED BY GOD IN THE WILDERNESS

READING: EXODUS 15:22-27, 16, 17; DEUTERONOMY 8:2-3; JOHN 6:26-35

AIM: To show how God taught and cared for the people He had chosen to become His Kingdom.

1. BACKGROUND

The Israelites having crossed the Red Sea turned southward and journeyed along the eastern shore. This was a dry desert country known as the wilderness of Shur and Etham. For three days Israel struggled through this lonely, barren waste following the cloud which directed them.

1. THE WILDERNESS OF ETHAM: WATER PROVIDED – Exodus 15:22-27

Water was scarce and when they reached a well the water was bitter. This place was named **Marah**, meaning bitter (Ruth 1:20). The people murmured against Moses asking “What shall we drink?” Moses turned in prayer to God, and was shown a certain tree which when cast into the water made it sweet. Israel’s needs were satisfied by this miracle.

At Marah, Israel not only witnessed the power of God but was given a lesson in faith. They were warned to heed and obey God’s commands lest he smite them with plagues and death as he had the Egyptians. They were reminded that if they trusted God and Moses their leader, they had no need to fear even though they were made to suffer.

2. THE WILDERNESS OF SIN: BREAD FROM HEAVEN - Exodus 16

After a brief rest at **Elim**, with its 70 palm trees and 12 wells of water Israel was then led eastward by Moses and Aaron to the **Wilderness of Sin** with its harsh, rugged mountains. The food supplies brought from Egypt were exhausted and again they murmured against their leaders and craved for the flesh pots and bread of Egypt.

That evening the people beheld a miracle. Quails were drawn to the spot and the people were thus provided with **flesh**. God promised to rain **bread** from heaven that the Israelites might gather it at “a certain rate every day” to test their faith in Him. “**Manna**” was the bread God provided in the morning (Exodus 16:15). This word means “What is it?” for that was the question Israel asked when it appeared.

Manna was round and white. The people were to gather an omer (nearly one gallon or 2 litres) for each person: sufficient only for the day’s need. If kept overnight it bred worms and stank. It tasted like honey and could be ground and baked into cakes. Any that remained on the ground melted as the sun became hot. On the sixth day sufficient for two days had to be gathered because the seventh day was the Sabbath of rest, an holy day for Israel.

God preserved the manna for the seventh day so that it did not corrupt. Later He instructed Aaron to put some in a golden pot to be placed in the Ark of the Covenant. This also was miraculously preserved until the Ark was lost (Exod. 16:20-26, 33-35; Heb. 9:4). For nigh on 40 years this miraculous supply of bread from heaven continued. Then as suddenly as it had begun it ceased when Israel entered the promised land (Josh. 5:12).

3. AT REPHIDIM: WATER FROM THE ROCK - Exodus 17:1-7

After journeying from the Wilderness of Sin the children of Israel were faced with yet another hardship when they camped in **Rephidim**. It was not far from Sinai which was the most southerly point of their wilderness

journey. So far God had mercifully provided all their needs, even flesh in the form of quails (Exod. 16:8; Psa. 78:15-20.)

But on reaching Rephidim after a tiring journey the people were disappointed to find that there was no water to drink. Again a terrible death appeared to threaten them and they turned on their leader. In spite of all God's goodness their faith and trust in Him was lacking, for they chided Moses saying "Give us water that we may drink".

Once more Moses made the complaints and threats of the people a matter of prayer to God who answered by instructing him what to do. He gathered Israel together and taking them to a rock in Horeb, he smote it with his rod and there came out of the rock sufficient water for the people to drink. **Massah** and **Meribah**, meaning strife, were the names given to that place because there Israel strove with Moses and God.

In 1 Cor. 10:4 the apostle Paul refers to Israel drinking water from the rock. **That rock, he says, was a type of Jesus Christ who, because he was smitten, is able to give life-giving waters to those who drink spiritually (John 4:1; 7:37-38).**

4. **THE AMALEKITE ATTACK** - Exodus 17:8-16

Now a different danger threatened Israel. As the people rested at Rephidim (it means places of rest) they were attacked by the Amalekites whilst they were "faint and weary" (Deut. 25:17-18). For a moment it seemed as though Israel was on the point of destruction. By God's command Moses appointed **Joshua** as commander of Israel and instructed him to go forth on the morrow and fight with Amalek.

The battle raged fiercely in the valley below whilst on the hilltop, Moses, Aaron and Hur watched its progress. It seemed that the more powerful army of Amalek might destroy the Israelites and Moses, being anxious for the welfare of God's people, lifted up his hand.

Immediately a change in fortune took place. Amalek was driven back and the soldiers of Israel pressed forward in their attack. But Moses' hands grew tired and as they drooped in weariness Amalek prevailed and Israel was driven back. Aaron and Hur came to Moses' assistance and held up his weary hands until sunset when victory was achieved.

God was the real victor. Amalek had attacked not only Israel but the God of Israel. Such an enemy of God's people was to be completely destroyed (Exod. 17:44). The people returned to their tents. This victory was a further evidence of God's care for them and of Moses their leader as a man of faith and prayer. Moses built an altar and called it "The Lord is my ensign" (see Isaiah 11:10).

5. **JESUS' TEACHINGS** - John 6:26-30

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness to change stones into bread to satisfy his hunger he resisted the temptation with, "**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God**" (Matt. 4:4). This was the lesson the Israelites should have learnt in the wilderness. Jesus quoted from Israel's experience (Deut. 8:2-3) and exhibited humility and a true sense of values.

The Israelites were given manna in the wilderness to sustain them. Similarly Jesus was able to give bread to those in need (Matt. 14:19-20). Both were miracles. In each case, many of the people only saw in it something to satisfy their physical needs (John 6:26-27).

Jesus' deep spiritual lessons based upon the manna, which go far beyond physical needs, were not readily perceived. The manna, which was Israel's food and essential for life, was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ in every respect. **Jesus was the bread of life sent by God from heaven** (John 6:32) born in Bethlehem meaning "House of Bread". As a man needs bread to nourish him physically he also must have spiritual food to sustain him spiritually. So we pray as Jesus taught, "Give us each day our daily bread".

The Israelites who ate of the manna died, but those who truly partake of the food Jesus has to offer shall live for ever in the Kingdom of God (John 6:35). Jesus said **“Except ye eat of the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you”.** (John 6:53).

6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

How can we partake of Jesus Christ, the bread from Heaven? We must apply to our lives those things he showed in his life. We must have humility, love, sympathy and submit absolutely to God's will. How can this be done?

Through reading God's word, meditating thereon, and prayer. Christ will become our spiritual food and drink. We will figuratively “eat” him as the Israelites did the manna in the wilderness, and we will be strengthened for life's journey through the wilderness. But we must do this every day, and thus learn the lesson that God was trying to teach the Israelites: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”.

REFERENCE LIBRARY

- “The Visible Hand of God”, chapter 15
- “Elpis Israel”, part 2, chapter 4
- “Moses My Servant”, chapter 3
- “Theophany”, chapter 5.
- “Witness for Christ”, part 3, chapters 4 and 6.
- “Scriptural Coincidences”, part 1, chapter 16.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Describe how God provided food and water for Israel in the wilderness.
- 2 How were the murmurings of Israel at Rephidim answered?
- 3 In what way did the smitten rock at Rephidim point forward to the work of Jesus?
- 4 What lessons did Jesus teach his listeners about Israel receiving manna in the wilderness?
- 5 Explain Jesus' words, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4)