

# BaptistWay: Making bitterness sweet and emptiness full

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- *The BaptistWay lesson for April 5 focuses on Exodus 15:22-16:18.*

We know one thing from the first paragraph of this story: This story applies directly to us. We know this because we easily can take the place of the Israelites in the story. And we know that because just three days after one of the greatest miracles of all time—which the Israelites experienced firsthand—the Israelites were grumbling about water (15:22-24). In their defense, however, they had spent three days trekking across an arid land without water, and the first water they found was bitter. We would complain, too.

## Healing the waters

When the people grumbled, Moses cried out to God (v. 25). God showed Moses how to make the water drinkable by throwing a special piece of wood into the water, and Moses threw in the wood. The people saw this, and God saw the people seeing this, and God gave them a test: “If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you” (vv. 25-26).

Immediately after the “healing” of the water and the giving of the test, the Israelites arrived at Elim, the place of 12 springs. Were there literally 12 springs at Elim? Was it a figurative number representing the 12 tribes of Israel? Have we become distracted by the particulars of the biblical narrative and lost sight of the test?

The people left Elim and entered the Desert of Sin, where they once again grumbled, although this time their grumbling was over the lack of food (16:1-3). This time, Moses didn't have to call out before God responded. God made the first move. God promised ample and daily bread, and with it, God gave the people another test.

### **This is a test**

"I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. ... On the sixth day, they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days" (vv. 4-5).

Yes, God provided what the people needed—water and food—but only after they grumbled against God (vv. 7-9, 12), and God gave what they needed as a test.

While God wanted trust and obedience from Israel (15:26, 16:4), God wanted more to provide for them as a sign of his character (v. 12). Although the narrative doesn't say this, I believe God wanted to provide for the Israelites as an act of love, not as a test of their love for God.

### **Pop quiz**

Think about a time you asked God for something? In what spirit or mood did you make your request? Did you grumble and complain? Were you angry with God?

Think about what followed your asking God for that thing? Did you get what you asked for? What did you do then?

Consider whether receiving what you asked for might have been a test. If it was a test, how would knowing it was a test change what you did after getting what you asked for?

How might the prospect of being tested by God change your approach to God in the future?

The test will be over the notes.

What student can pass a test without first being taught? Not only did God test, God also taught the Israelites in their first few days of freedom. Peter Enns brings out this point in *Exodus: The NIV Application Commentary*.

God desired Israel's trust and obedience, but God also desired to be known by and through Israel. God promised the Israelites their fill of food and declared they would then "know that I am the Lord your God" (v. 12). In other words, they would know God as God through receiving their fill of food. God promised, and then God acted, teaching two lessons—God is true to his word and God provides.

### **Revelation of the character of God**

Anytime we see "I am the Lord your God" in Scripture, we need to pause. We need to look at what precedes and/or follows this statement, because "I am the Lord your God" is more than a nametag. It is the revelation of the very character and nature of God. Thus, we do not learn "God is our provider" through propositional truth. We learn God is our provider through God's actions. God is *a priori* (prior to/independent of our experience), but we only know it *a posteriori* (after/through our experience).

Just days before, God taught this and one more lesson through the waters of Marah. Along with showing Moses how to make the water drinkable, God taught the Israelites, "I am the Lord, who heals you" (15:26). Not only did God "heal" the water, God also turned the bitterness of slavery into the sweetness of freedom.

After 400 years in slavery, the Israelites would need many such lessons in

freedom. Unfortunately, healing sometimes takes a long time.