

Introduction:

Our Lord suffered much on what was meant to be a day of joyful worship and love for one's fellow man. The Old Testament commands God's people to, "call the Sabbath a delight", but for Jesus, there was often grief at the hardness of heart of those religious leaders who desecrated that holy day by their hatred of our Savior (Mark 3:1-6). Well, there have always been trying times for God when it came to issues of disobedience surrounding this holy day, as we will see for the next two weeks in these notes on the Exodus wanderings. Through the failings of Israel of old, may we learn how God "tests" us in order to show us our sinful hearts, that we might find rest anew in His Grace.

Mon/Tue: read Exodus 15:25-16:30.

God tests Israel with thirst in Exodus 15:25, and with hunger in Exodus 16:1-5. Such testing was for their benefit in order to humble Israel into a more constant dependence on God. God divides His 'hunger-test' of His people into two parts.

First in verses 4-21, God's 'hunger-test' consists of telling Israel to gather only enough for their daily needs, trusting Him for the next day's supply, instead of sinfully hoarding the manna overnight. Sadly, some would not trust God's care and the manna which they unfaithfully set aside rotted overnight, becoming full of maggots in Exodus 16:20.

The second part of the 'hunger-test' in Exodus 16:22-30 consisted of resting on the Sabbath Day instead of gathering manna. God clearly tells Israel that if they do venture out on the day of rest to gather manna, they will find none (Ex. 16:25). Yet some ventured out in a fruitless search for manna in Exodus 16:27! Look at the Divine grief over such stubborn unbelief as God speaks in Exodus 16:28-29:

How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out.

Meditate and Pray: Well now – that is a question worth pondering: "How long would Israel refuse to keep God's commands" when it comes to these hunger and thirst tests in the desert? Sadly, for the next forty years their complaints would be the same. No wonder God's salvation is all about *Divine Perseverance*! From beginning to end, it must be God's persevering grace which carries us through the desert of this world, even as hymn # 457 says:

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of Thy redeeming love.

Here I raise my Ebenezer;
Hither by thy help I'm come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood;

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

Wednesday: read Exodus 16:27-28 and Mark 6:1-6.

We left God expressing wonder at the sin of His own people in Exodus 16:28: “*How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?*” It is from the deep well of Divine compassion that such questions come. God is not rendered impotent or speechless at our propensity to sin. He is sovereign over all things – even our sin! But such Divine amazement is the only way for our Holy and compassionate God to lovingly depict for us the scope and danger of sin’s wickedness and perversity so that we might run from it! Sin astounds God – and therefore must be a terror to us! Run from it! Don’t expose yourself to its bomb blasts! In New Testament terms, if the hard-hearted unbelief of Jesus’ own townsfolk could result in an amazed Jesus, able to do “only a few” miracles in Mark 6:4-6, then what foolishness for any of us to think that we can trifle with a sinful world or compromise with sin within! God’s advice is urgent: “Flee.... Flee away from all sin and into my arms!” Use hymn # 534 as your prayer for God’s constant help against sin:

O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn
And drove Thee from my breast.

Where is the blessedness I knew,
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate’er that idol be
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.

Thurs/Fri: read Exodus 16:28; Numbers 14:29-35 and Numbers 20:1-11.

We are struggling with questions about Israel’s deeply-seated tendency to sin which even made God ask: “How long will you refuse to keep my commands?” (Ex. 16:28) The reality for Israel is that after forty years of watching their parents die in the desert under God’s curse (Numbers 14:29-35), many wished that *they too had died along with their brothers in the desert* rather than submit to God’s loving discipline! Their language is graphic in Numbers 20:3: “Oh that we had died with our brothers *before the LORD!*” What rebelliousness! Yet we see even the godliest Elijah and Job at times of despair wish for the same thing – see 1 Kings 19:4 and Job 3:3! How terrible to see what sinful requests can come from our mouths! How gracious when God turns a deaf ear to them.

Prayer of Reflection: *Thank you, Father, for your grace in **not** granting Israel’s request for death at your hands in Numbers 20:3! Instead you again provided water from the Rock in Numbers 20:8-11. In the same way, thank you for the complaining demands which you do not answer in our lives! Thank you that you know how to say “no” to us, in order to show us more grace! Help us to rest content under all the trials you send into our lives. Help us to learn that it is better to have a gainsaying God who graciously refuses our desires, than a God who grants us our sinful requests and then sends His judgment along with them (see Psalm 106:14-15)! We pray all these things in the Name of your Son, who “does all things well” – even when He refuses to give us what we impatiently demand! Amen.*

Fri/Sat/Sun:

As we see God patiently restrain His people from rebellion, and teach them in Exodus 15-17 what it means to rest by faith in His provision and guidance in the desert, two hymns come to mind about God’s faithful guidance of us in the desert and out of sin:

Hymn # 598: (William Williams)

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Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
 Pilgrim through this barren land.
 I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
 Hold me with Thy powerful hand.
 Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,
 Feed me till I want no more;
 Feed me till I want no more.

Lord, I trust Thy mighty power,
 Wondrous are Thy works of old;
 Thou deliver'st Thine from thralldom,
 Who for naught themselves had sold:
 Thou didst conquer, Thou didst conquer,
 Sin, and Satan and the grave,
 Sin, and Satan and the grave.

Hymn # 491 (Ray Palmer)

Take me, O my Father, take me;
 take me, save me, through thy Son;
 that which thou wouldst have me, make me,
 let thy will in me be done.
 Long from thee my footsteps straying,
 thorny proved the way I trod;
 weary come I now, and praying,
 take me to thy love, my God.

Open now the crystal fountain,
 Whence the healing stream doth flow;
 Let the fire and cloudy pillar
 Lead me all my journey through.
 Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
 Be Thou still my Strength and Shield;
 Be Thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
 Bid my anxious fears subside;
 Death of deaths, and hell's destruction,
 Land me safe on Canaan's side.
 Songs of praises, songs of praises,
 I will ever give to Thee;
 I will ever give to Thee.

Fruitless years with grief recalling,
 humbly I confess my sin;
 at thy feet, O Father, falling,
 to thy household take me in.
 Freely now to thee I proffer
 this relenting heart of mine;
 freely life and soul I offer,
 gift unworthy love like thine.

Once the world's Redeemer, dying,
 bore our sins upon the tree;
 on that sacrifice relying,
 now I look in hope to thee:
 Father, take me; all forgiving,
 fold me to thy loving breast;
 in thy love for ever living
 I must be forever blest.