

Last week in Exodus we saw Israel's most serious outburst against Moses thus far (Numbers 20:3). Such rebelliousness became a monument of their years of desert wandering. The martyr Stephen offered a withering condemnation of them: "This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, "Who made you ruler and judge?" He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God Himself... But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and their hearts turned back to Egypt (Acts 7:35 & 39)." May God use even this sad period in Israel's history to magnify both His diagnosis of our sin and His graceful skill in saving us.

Monday: Read Exodus 15:22-26; 16:2-3, 17:1-3 & Mark 1:40-42

The God of Pity

Sometimes it is best to lance the boil of sin so that all its putrid contents flow healingly out of the wound. In that spirit, God exposes Israel's multiple episodes of grumbling in Exodus. Note, however, that such an eruption of sin, far from causing Him to draw back, draws forth from God's heart all the healing skill which Exodus 15:26 promises: "I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD who heals you." What a relief to Israel that none of the terrible diseases so common in Egypt, including self-reliance, grumbling, and mistrust, need afflict them as long as they count God as their Redeemer.

Meditate and Pray: Let us learn to trust in God's ever-present willingness to touch even the most loathsome wounds of our sin ... in order to cleanse and heal us – just as Jesus, moved with pity, said to the leper: "I am willing, be clean"(Mark 1:41).

Tuesday: Read Exodus 15:27-16:1

All Accounted For

In Exodus there are many harrowing examples of the *depth and persistence* of unbelief in God's people. But let us also celebrate God's healing and shepherding skill in bringing *all of Israel* through the dangers of the Red Sea and the desert. See the LORD delivering Israel from their enemies the Egyptians! Behold Him saving them from the danger of thirst and the far more sinister spirit of grumbling by refreshing them with water! God is able to safely lead "the whole Israelite community" to their next campsite at the desert of Sin (pronounced "seen" or "sheen").

Meditate and Pray: Let us celebrate the LORD's shepherding skill in keeping *all* His flock intact! Even more than Moses, Jesus is able to lead us safely through every danger. As Spurgeon puts it:

In the last time, when the elect shall sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and of the Lamb, it shall be the boast of Jesus, "Of all whom you have given me, I have lost none." In heaven there shall not be a vacant throne.
Charles Spurgeon, Morning and Evening, Jan 21st entry.

Weds/Thurs: Read Exodus 16:2-17:7 & Psalm 78:40-43

Resting on the Promises

Throughout Exodus 15 to 17, we see a repeated pattern of "testing God" on the part of His people. As Psalm 78:40-41 puts it: "How often they rebelled against Him in the desert and grieved Him in the wasteland. Again and again they put God to the test; they vexed the Holy One of Israel."

But what exactly does it mean to "test God"? To test God is to question His ability to provide according to His covenant promises, as Israel's question (Exodus 17:7) puts it: "Is the LORD among us or not?" They are asking, "Has God tricked us or is He truly with us with grace to save and preserve us?" To put it another way, "test" God means to "require unnecessary proof of what should be believed without it" (Archibald Alexander).

We see how heinous this sin of “testing” God was when we are reminded of all the miracles which preceded Israel's grumblings. How could Israel so quickly doubt God when they had seen all the plagues in Egypt and walked miraculously through the Red Sea? What amazing unbelief! How arrogant man can be to demand that God satisfy such lust for a sign!

Meditate and Pray: Lord, when you speak to us with the promises of your Word – help us to take what you say and submit to it without murmuring or doubting. Grant us the assurance and peace which come from accepting, rather than testing, your words of eternal life. We have no one else to turn to. Therefore, please strengthen our faith - even if we have to wait long for our faith to be vindicated before a cynical and unbelieving world. Lord, you must give us your daily manna or our faith with fail. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Friday: Read Exodus 17:1-7 & Deuteronomy 6:16

Arguments

Perhaps the most famous case of Israel “testing God” occurs here in Exodus 17. In verse 7, the place is named “Massah,” which means “temptation” and refers to Israel testing and goading God by insulting His power to keep His promises and care for His own people. This place, moreover, becomes so famous that it is given a second name by Moses: “Meribah,” which means “contention” or “argument,” referring to Israel's brazenness in daring to argue with their God. There is no limit to what sin within will aim for. Sin will not stop but continues to goad us to more and more shameful eruptions. No wonder Moses points back to this place 40 years later (Deuteronomy 6:16) to revive the memory of testing God! He knows that our tendency to provoke God needs continual warnings. Although a dozen times sin wells up within, fighting is winning, even though we continue to stumble over the same sins daily. Our fighting (stop, repent, receive forgiveness) is preventing a worse escalation of that sin which will destroy our lives and our loved ones as well.

Meditate and Pray: Lord, we come in prayer, broken by our tendency to sin and to insult You in our sinning. Forgive us that we are so sensitive when others affront us, but so unheeding to the effect our sins have on Your honor as the promise-keeping God. Make us ever more sensitive to the danger of testing you. We pray in the Name of your Son, who never doubted your Word and never tried your patience. Cover us with His righteousness we plead. Amen.

Sat/Sun: Read Deuteronomy 6:13-19; Ephesians 6:10-20 & Luke 4:12-13

Warfare

Since there is no limit to what sin within us will aim for, no wonder Moses points back to 40 years earlier and the sin at Massah to revive the memory of testing God (Deut. 6:16). He knows that Israel's entrance to the Promised Land will *not be spiritually safe* unless it is coupled with spiritual watchfulness, and a *taking seriously* the threats from the idolatry to which they will be exposed with the Canaanites (Deut. 6:14).

Spiritual warfare ought to be mentioned *right alongside* the most glaring sins of the people of God. Dr. Andrew Selle cites Paul's echo of the warning of Deut. 6:14:

Paul acknowledges that idols reveal demonic powers behind them: “What pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God” (1 Cor. 10:20; cf. Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37).” Those who live for idols become “fellowshippers” with demons ... Demons demand worship, attack true communion with God, and destroy fellowship between God's people. To accomplish that end, the demonic host employs deceitful tactics, intelligent organization, and raw power (Eph. 6:10-12), and they are exceedingly wicked. (Our) perspective on evil (must) consider the lies,

demands, and false promises fabricated by the enemy.

Andrew Selle, *Make Smart Choices*, pp 163-164.

Moreover, this spiritual danger from idolatry is not just an Old Testament danger. The church needs continual warnings to keep us from repeating such provocative sin. As Selle goes on to say in his footnote 151 on pp 163-164 of his book (commenting on Paul's concern for spiritual warfare against the church in Eph 6:10-19):

... Paul's use of multiple terms (in describing the spiritual battle that rages) indicates, at the least, that our enemy meshes intelligent and powerful organization with deceit and utter wickedness. That is all we need to know to drive us to our knees – which is certainly Paul's intent (6:18-19). Notice carefully that the introductory word, "finally" (verse 10), cues us that Paul is not changing the subject. Throughout the book, he has instructed the church about its covenantal relationship with God and all its implications for our relationships with other believers and in the wider culture. Now, he warns us that those *same* relationships – the church, marriage, the family, and society – have become the battleground of spiritual warfare. Therefore, the church must stand firm *together* with the full armor God provides, and *pray together* towards that end.

Andrew Selle, *Make Smart Choices*, pp 163-164 Footnote #151.

Meditate and Pray: Just as Jesus Christ while on earth had to reckon with the constant threat that Satan would return to tempt Him, "at an opportune time" (Luke 4:13), so we as Christ's Body must realize that we face *an even more dangerous threat* – because of our sin combining with Satan's tempting power. In the words of John Owen:

... after a believer has walked in a fruitful course of obedience, to the glory of God and edification of the church of Christ, being afresh set upon, by the return of Satan in one way or another, (that believer) has all he can do all the remainder of his life just to keep himself alive; in the meantime, as to many graces, they go into woeful decay and go backwards ...
Wherever, then, our spiritual strength is impaired by sin, or which way soever our lusts press, Satan falls in with that weakness and presses towards its ruin.

John Owen, *Works*, Volume 6, p. 295.

Our only safety? We must resist Satan by faith and by prayerful cries for help (in terms of 1 Peter 5:9), believing that Satan must flee from the believer who seeks the Lord's timely grace (Hebrews 4:16). Sing to God *Trinity Hymnal* #574, which well expresses both our need for watchfulness and also our assurance in Christ.

1 Christian, dost thou see them
on the holy ground,
how the pow'rs of darkness
rage thy steps around?
Christian, up and smite them,
counting gain but loss,
in the strength that cometh
by the holy cross.

2 Christian, dost thou feel them,
how they work within,
striving, tempting, luring,
goadng into sin?
Christian, never tremble;
never be downcast;
gird thee for the battle,
watch and pray and fast.

[continued on next page]

4 Hear the words of Jesus:

"O my servant true:

thou art very weary -

I was weary too;

but that toil shall make thee

some day all mine own,

and the end of sorrow

shall be near my throne.