

# *EXODUS*

**From Slavery to Service**

# *8. Wandering in the Wilderness*

**Bread and Water (Exodus  
15:22—18:27)**

# *References*

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# *Exodus 15:22 – 18:27*

**Introduction to the Wilderness**

**Wanderings**

# *Introduction: The Wilderness*

- **The Wilderness**
  - After God's grand act of saving God's people, the Israelites seem to find themselves in a godforsaken wilderness, where they will wander for 40 years
  - "Wilderness is life beyond redemption but short of consummation ... the former seems ineffective and the latter only a mirage" (Fretheim)
  - Wilderness is a place "betwixt and between" (Cohn)

# *Introduction: The Wilderness*

- In the **wilderness**, slavery with security of the present may seem preferable to freedom and the uncertainty of wandering from one oasis to another

# *Introduction: Adolescence of God's Children*

- **The Adolescence of the Children of God**
  - Again and again in the wanderings in the wilderness, God's people seem ungrateful and disloyal, in what might be described as their "adolescence" as the children of God
  - "If God wants a mature child, the possibility of defiance must be risked. . ." (Fretheim)

# *Introduction: Adolescence of God's Children*

- “... God works through their feelings of abandonment and helplessness, their words of complaint and acts of rebelliousness, and their need for reassurance, protection, a new self-identity... God sticks by them through it all. God has made promises to this people, and God is a promise-keeper.” (Fretheim)



*Exodus 15:22-27*

**Bitter Water Made Sweet**

## *Exodus 15:22-27: Bitter Water Made Sweet*

- Within hours of the Song of the Sea, there is a major problem: no water. Praise becomes bitter complaining
- Two blocks of text on the wanderings in the wilderness:
  - Exodus 15:22—18:27
  - Numbers 10:11—36; 13)

# *Exodus 15:22-27: Bitter Water Made Sweet*

- Pattern we will see (Fretheim):
  - 1. Journey
  - 2. Need / Murmuring
  - 3. Judgment\*\*
  - 4. Repentance\*\*
  - 5. Intercession
  - 6. Deliverance

\*\* = Only in the Numbers narrative

## *Exodus 15:22-27: Bitter Water Made Sweet*

- Moses intercedes; God responds immediately
- The solution for the bitter water is a *natural* one: God shows Moses a certain type of wood that can sweeten the water. Moses is assumed to know what to do with it.
  - “God is here working in and through human knowledge and the “healing” properties of certain elements of the natural order.”  
(Fretheim)

# *Exodus 15:22-27: Bitter Water Made Sweet*

- One part of creation is used to put right another element of creation
- We should be alert to resources within creation that can solve problems within creation
- God is present in all such human endeavors: God works and heals in and through such human questing, knowledge, imagination and ingenuity

*Exodus 16:1-36*

**Manna and Quail**

# *Exodus 16:1-36: Manna and Quail*

- Complaint now is no *food*, which overrides hope for freedom and well-being
  - Reminiscent of Esau giving up his birthright to Jacob for food in Genesis
- God's response:
  - 1. "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you..."
  - 2. establishment of a sabbath time

## *Exodus 16:1-36: Manna and Quail*

- Manna: popular name for the bread (*man hu* = “What is it?”)
  - Exodus 16:31: sweet, “like wafers made with honey”
  - Numbers 11:8: like “cakes baked in oil”
  - Rabbis: taste changed to meet preferences of individual



## *Exodus 16:1-36: Manna and Quail*

- Fretheim: stresses the naturalness of the manna and the quail
  - “If the provisions of God in the wilderness are all subsumed under the extraordinary or miraculous, then the people of God will tend to look for God’s providential care only in that which falls outside the ordinary...[they] will not be able to see in the very ordinariness of things that God is the one who bestows blessings again and again.”

# *Exodus 16:1-36: Manna and Quail*

- **Manna:**

- A type of plant lice punctures the fruit of the tamarisk tree, causing the fruit to excrete a yellowish-white flake or ball
- Disintegrates in the heat of the day; congeals in cold
- Sweet taste, rich in sugars
- Decays quickly and attracts ants
- Gathered today by natives, who bake it into a kind of bread (called manna)

# *Exodus 16:1-36: Manna and Quail*

- **Quail:**
  - Migratory birds flying from Africa or blown in from the Mediterranean land may land in the evening, exhausted
- Miraculous aspects of the manna:
  - Not available on the sabbath
  - Preservation for two days before the sabbath
- God's purpose in providing food: so *that the people shall know*:
  - 1. the LORD is their God
  - 2. that God has heard their murmurings

## *Exodus 16:1-36: Manna and Quail*

- With the manna comes requirements that test whether the people will heed God's will
  - Deut 8:2-3, 16: that they might learn humility and remember that human beings do not live by bread alone but also by the word of God
- Threefold expressions of God's will for Israel:
  - 1. time for solemn rest (sabbath)
    - Sabbath built into the created order in Genesis 2:1-3

# *Exodus 16:1-36: Manna and Quail*

- 2. the rest is not to be at the expense of daily needs
  - Mark 2:27: the sabbath is made for people, not people for the sabbath
  - Moses tells people to enjoy a sabbath meal: it is a rest from work, not from the enjoyment of life
- 3. manna can be gathered only one day at a time
  - “discipline of dailyness”
  - No need to hoard God’s gifts of creation (Luke 12:18, 1 Tim 6:6-10)

# *Exodus 16:1-36: Manna and Quail*

- No need to have anxieties about what to eat tomorrow (Luke 12:22-30)
- Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:11): Give us this day our daily bread

# *Exodus 16:1-36: Manna and Quail*

- Two quarts of manna to be kept for posterity
  - Anticipates the tabernacle
  - Links God's gift of daily bread with community worship

*Exodus 17:1-7*

**Water From the Rock**



# *Exodus 17:1-7. Water from the Rock*

- Last story in Exodus to involve water
- Many of the major events in Exodus tied to water:
  - Pharaoh's order to drown Hebrew infants in the Nile
  - Moses placed in the Nile River, where he is saved
  - Moses meets his wife Zipporah at a well
  - First plague: water turns into blood
  - God saves Israel by parting the waters of the Red Sea
  - Miriam and Moses sing the Song of the Sea
  - During the wanderings in the desert we have two stories of life-giving water

# *Exodus 17:1-7. Water from the Rock*

- Symbolism of water:
  - Genesis
    - **Chaos and death** (fathomless deep in Genesis 1; flood of Genesis 6-9)
    - **Life** (mist and rivers in Genesis 2)
  - Jesus:
    - Walks on water and calms the stormy sea
    - Heals the blind man with the waters of Eden's Gihon spring
    - From Jesus side flowed the blood of suffering mixed with the water that gives life

# *Exodus 17:1-7. Water from the Rock*

- John 4:14 “but those who drink of the water I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (NRSV)
- Revelation 22:
  - Sea and the forces of chaos are no more
  - The river of the New Jerusalem is the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb
- Baptism:
  - We die with Christ in the chaotic waters
  - We put on Christ, the source of life-giving waters

# *Exodus 17:1-7. Water from the Rock*

- **Testing God**
  - Putting God to the proof
  - Trying to coerce God to act or show God's self
  - Making one's belief *contingent* on a demonstration by God
  - Turning "faith into sight"
- **Example:**
  - Devil asking Jesus to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple

# *Exodus 17:1-7. Water from the Rock*

- Example: believers who say:
  - I will not take special precautions on a dangerous ventures; God will take care of me
  - I will not take out insurance; God is my insurance policy
- Testing God:
  - Makes God a servant, at our beck and call, violating the “Godness” of God
  - Creates a false understanding of faith, as in: “Had you had sufficient faith, God would have protected you / healed you.”

## *Exodus 17:1-7. Water from the Rock*

- Placed named Massah (“testing”) / Meribah (“quarrel”)
  - The memory of testing God at Massah will haunt Israel:
    - Deut 6:16: “Do not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah”
    - Ps 78:18, 41, 56
    - Ps 81:7
    - Ps 95:9

*Exodus 17:8-16*

**Amalek Defeated**

## *Exodus 17:8-16. Amalek Defeated*

- People leave Egypt ready for battle (13:18)
- Amalekites: desert nomadic people, often hostile to Israel (Judges 6:3-4; I Samuel 27:8)
  - Deut 25:17-19: they attacked “when you were faint and weary, and cut off at your rear all who lagged behind you”



## *Exodus 17:8-16. Amalek Defeated*

- Amalekites defeated through a combination of divine and human energies:
  - Trustworthy human leadership
  - Active community defense
  - Divine will
- Thoughts on the effectiveness of Moses' hand and staff held aloft:
  - A prayer gesture
  - God making use of traditional, ancient ideas that the staff has magical properties
  - To see the hand and staff of Moses was to see the hand of God, God's power at work in their situation

# *Exodus 18:1-12*

## **Jethro's Witness**

## *Exodus 18:1-12. Jethro's Witness*

- Exodus 18 witnesses to aspects of what it means to be the people of God
  - **18:1-12:** declaration and confession of what God has done for Israel
  - **18:13-27:** formation of community structures that reflect and give shape to a life of faith
- Jethro, on hearing the good news of all that God has done for Israel, responds with a:
  - Doxology of public praise
  - Public confession and worship of Yahweh as the God of gods and Lord of Lords

# *Exodus 18:13-27*

## **Jethro's Advice**

# *Exodus 18:13-27. Jethro's Advice*

- Moses seen as a somewhat inept administrator, unable to delegate authority
  - He is burning himself out
  - He is taxing the patience of people, who stand in line all day to get an audience with him
- Good “administration” and order is not trivial. The good ordering of human affairs is integral to God’s intentions for cosmic order
- Justice is not simply God’s responsibility, but is also the task of the community and must be dispersed through the community