

## WHAT GRUMBLERS REVEAL ABOUT THEMSELVES

**Exodus 15:22–18:27**

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Our Scripture today is Exodus 15:22 through chapter 18. There are five crises which come in this particular span of the Book of Exodus. The first crisis is found in chapter 15:22–27—the crisis at bitter wells or Marah. The second crisis has to do with food, Exodus 16. God gives manna. The third crisis comes from the lack of water, chapter 17:1–7. The fourth crisis comes with Israel's first engagement in battle after the Exodus with the Amalekites, chapter 17:8–16. The fifth crisis is a crisis of leadership, a crisis of administration, Exodus 18.

### **I. First crisis.**

And as we look at these crises we're not approaching Exodus at all from simply an historical perspective. For it is a personal pilgrimage. If we will look closely at the text of Exodus we will find that there is an experience which God has for His people after the coming through the sea, before they cross Jordan into Canaan. That period in the wilderness is roughly comparable in a spiritual sense to our walk through life. God, at redemption, brings us through the sea, so that we are safe in our spirit in Him. The crossing of Jordan may well represent the river of death through which we pass to enter into Canaan, God's heaven. What the wilderness was physically to the Children of Israel, a place of testing, so life is represented to us as a pilgrim people in the form of a wilderness experience. We're in between two great events—one event is behind us as believers, the event of God's deliverance in saving us from the power of sin and death. But there is yet an event ahead of us, the crossing of the Jordan into Canaan. Canaan is representative of our eternal home in glory.

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From the crossing of the sea, the people of God are led into the wilderness. They will be in the wilderness for some time. The wilderness in Sinai did not necessarily represent a waste of sand nor a total desert such as the Sahara. But when the term “wilderness” is used it refers to a broad expanse of land, which does afford enough pasture for wondering nomad tribes to have their flocks watered and their life sustained. It is in such a wilderness that Israel is moving after the crossing of the sea.

It immediately faces a test. The test is a certain test. For the minute you go into the wilderness you will be tested. And the minute you pick up to follow Jesus Christ after He has saved you, you can be sure that tests will come. It is in the New Testament that Peter must admonish us to not be surprised at the fiery ordeal, which tests our faith. We realize the certainty of testing not only from the Scripture but from our own experience as people.

I sense it keenly as a pastor when I realize the levels of testing that are present even in this church family. Testing often comes in a sudden way. It arises quickly even after victory. Thus in verse 22, Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. They went three days into the wilderness and found no water. Seventy-two hours after Israel’s greatest triumph they found themselves in tremendous extremity. After singing the song of Moses and dancing on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, they now are in a place of great despair. How often like the trials of life that come upon us so quickly; after victory comes an immense moment of testing. Seventy-two hours after triumph.

The trial for Israel is a severe trial. It is a severe trial for two reasons. They had perhaps carried enough water to last them for three days. We know that water is one of the heavier things to carry. There’s only so much water the donkeys could have carried with them. So much that one

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could have carried on his back. In three days the water is gone. It would be the first thing to run out. And it would be naturally the first test which would be found for a wilderness people.

But add to the severity of not having water the disillusionment of finding Marah. The children of Israel had been marching these three days. They had been marching treeless, therefore shadowless. They had been marching waterless. For three days, no wells were in sight. They had kept going bravely, perhaps continuing to sing the song of Moses and Miriam. When in the distance they spotted water, it could have so easily been, in this wasteland, a mirage. But having seen in the distance the presence of water, the word filters through the crowd: "Water is ahead!" They eagerly strain forward and find the water, water which will assuage their thirst. Only upon arriving to the place of water, they find that the water is undrinkable. For man and beast it is bitter.

Thus in Exodus 15, which records one of the greatest hymns of triumph in all of the Old Testament, we have side by side one of the greatest complaints of defeat. The people murmured against Moses saying, "What shall we drink?"

The bitter well is so descriptive of life. You may, for example, brace yourself to live without human love, having been bitterly disappointed. But when it comes almost within your reach and then eludes, you can become broken with heartache. It may be that on the wasteland of life there are some things, which occur which bring for you an eminent source of hope as you approach it. A marriage or a friendship or a new home or a new job or a new partnership. "If I can just get a hold of that experience everything will be well in my life. The thirst which I have will be assuaged." Only you take it up and to find that in the taking of it up it may not have given the assurance and the blessedness which you had thought when you approached it.

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Who of us has not muttered “Marah” at some point in our life when we have strained every nerve to reach a goal, and upon reaching that goal, have found that it did not have what we thought it promised? We can well identify with the disappointment of Israel.

They complained and murmured. This is their third failure in the Book of Exodus. Their first failure was when they went to Moses and complained that he had gotten them into a jam by demanding their release before Pharaoh.

Their second failure occurred just prior to God’s great miracle of the parting of the sea when they said to Moses that he had brought them out of the wilderness to die. Here they fail again. However, here for the first time in Exodus the word “murmur” is used. It’s a striking difference for in the previous two failures they had gone directly to Moses with their complaints. But now that attitude emerges which does not assume directness with Moses, but rather represents a complete cry of murmuring or gossiping within the camp against him. It is not a direct revolt, face-to-face encounter with him. It is rather an indirection of complaining.

The nature of sin, of course, is revealed in their complaint. Inevitably we attempt to blame others for the difficulties we ourselves get into. All Israel had to do in this moment is what we have to do when we get into life’s situations—to remember that God has not failed us in the past. We can count upon God in the future. Israel, lacking faith in God, turns and scapegoats and blames. Thus the whole responsibility is laid upon Moses’ shoulders. But to the murmuring, God responds graciously. There is no indictment by God of Israel. There is no lashing out against them for their lack of faith. Indeed, when we find throughout the Old Testament the steadfast love of God, the word “steadfast love” denotes the longsuffering of God toward the people of Israel. In all of their earlier complaints, God never contended with them, never even chided them, but patiently bore with them through their early stages in the wilderness.

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I think it is with God that way when we first come to Christ. The Lord expects that as young people growing up in His kingdom that there will be times as children when we will fail Him. There will be times when we disappoint the grace of God. But it is He, in His loving arms, who bears us up. It is He who is able to distinguish the sins of the erring from the sins of liberation. He knows where we're at.

The grace of God does not indict Israel and the grace of God is instrumental in making bitter waters sweet. There is a transformation which takes place in the waters at Marah through the Lord showing to Moses a tree, which Moses is to cast into the waters and the waters are made sweet. This is an intriguing miracle. It raises the question as to whether the miracle is a result of God's direct intervention or because God chose an indirect means—He knew of the healing properties in the tree which were an antidote to the water. There appears to be that kind of possibility from the wilderness experience. Did God use direction or indirection in the granting of the sweetness of the waters? I think it may be well to realize the chain, which links a particular effect to its cause. It may be long or it may be short. God may sometimes use many links in a chain of operation, which flows from Himself to effect a particular end which He wants. Or it may be that He will eliminate all the links of a chain and simply by His direct intervention bring a miracle.

An example of this is the wedding at Cana. The Lord, when He turned the water into wine, simply took out all the links in the chain of cause and effect—the whole process of planting seeds, growing the vine, harvesting the grapes, crushing them and letting them for a time distill so that they might be finally the drinkable form of wine. All of the links of the normal chain are broken out and God's direct power is seen. But on many occasions, He will use the links in the

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chain. In either case, whether God uses the links in the chain or works directly, the ultimate cause is God.

If in the Old Testament the Lord would allow a tree to be cast into the water to make the water sweet, so it may be well that in this age He allows us to take an aspirin to make a headache well, the ultimate cause being the Lord.

As Christians we recognize, of course, that the ultimate cause of healing is the power of God, no matter what agency is used.

Further, if we spiritualize this story of the tree being cast into the water (which is a real temptation) we may say that when the tree of Christ, which is His cross, is cast into the bitter waters of our life, it turns the bitterness into sweetness. His cross is available for your bitterness and for mine.

From this God teaches Israel a lesson. He indicates to them that in the future He is going to put them to the test. That in effect if they will keep His statutes, His ordinances, His commandments He will give them a health maintenance plan for their experience in the wilderness. The premium for the health maintenance plan is obedience. The promise in the plan is protection from all of the diseases of Egypt. We learn from later Scripture that there are some additions to the policy. It is not God's covenant with His people for all time as is clear from John 9:3 when Jesus does not attribute sickness to disobedience to God. Further, there is an addition to the fact that the protection, which is given to Israel here, is not a protection from the diseases of other nations but simply of Egypt. But it's simply a reference to the fact that as long as Israel walks with God it will be exempt from the plagues which had been brought upon the land. The essence of it is that God will care for His people physically in the wilderness. Even as everything here represented

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on the physical scale is a spiritual fulfillment in the course of our lives so we may say God will care for us completely and totally spiritually in our experience through the wilderness.

The sequel to Marah is found in verse 27, that after Marah they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees and they encamped there by the water. Thank God the Elims of life follow the Marahs. When you walk with the Lord, you will inevitably find this kind of thing coming through, that the Elims do follow the bitter wells. Likewise there are tests which follow the Elims.

### **II. The second crisis which Israel experienced is a crisis related to food.**

The totality of it is Exodus 16 and there are many important ramifications of this even in the New Testament. It is a test, which occurs some thirty days after the Passover. We read in 16:1 the specific time—the fifteenth day of the second month. They had left Egypt on the fifteen-day of the first month. Their provisions are now running out. If their water had run out after three days, now their food is running out after thirty days. They had brought as much as they could.

They had operated with rations as long as they could. Now the question was—“Would God make provision for those whom He had redeemed? Will God take the responsibility of caring for those whom He has saved? Or has He saved us simply to let us die without substance or support?”

You know the answer and so do I. But in the moment of discouragement it is easy to forget what the answer is. Yes! God will sustain those whom He has redeemed.

Israel’s reaction in its failure is precisely noted in verses 2 and 3. This is characteristic of crises when we are overcome with despondency. There is a mark of despair. The despair is so great they say “Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt.” They wouldn’t have really done, that but despair inevitably brings distortion and it brings blame. Thus Moses is sad that he has brought the people out to kill them in the wilderness with hunger.

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One of the things which we must learn to realize as a temptation in our life is that when we have done wrong the inevitable attempt of the enemy will be to cause us to destroy, cause us to blame others for what we have done that is not right. The source of healing in our lives spiritually is to accept the responsibility and also to simply trust that the God who has brought us forth will sustain us.

Again, through verses 4–30 we see the grace of God in operation to the complaints of Israel. God does not take a rod to His whimpering children, but He seeks to win them with patience. He will give them manna. Even the giving of manna according to the text of Exodus is to have a teaching experience for Israel. It's striking that almost all of God's miracles have a teaching aspect.

They're not simply done as wonders whereby we may open our mouth and gape in awe. But rather all of the miracles are windows through which we look into understanding something about the person and character of God. Thus the manna is given as the means of tests. The Lord indicates in verse 4 that one test which He will give is the test of obedience regarding its not being over gathered. Will there be greedy who will attempt to save up, not trusting God for the next day? The Lord is going to give them something which will force them to depend upon the Lord day by day. As is your need, so will your strength be. That is going to be His message to Israel. It will be a constant test of dependence.

Not only that, but there's an additional test that on the Sabbath Day there will be a test that the manna not be under gathered. So that on the day previous to the Sabbath there is to be a double portion that is brought together.

There is a warning by the spiritual leadership in verses 6–12. When God has given the testing instructions, Moses calls the whole of the nation together and says to them that they must begin to learn that their murmuring against him is a murmuring against God. No doubt the murmuring

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had been getting to Moses when he had been taking the flack from the people when they should have the courage to give the flack to God. Only they had respect for God and did not. But Moses is to say that that indirect complaining against God, God is now going to understand as a direct complaint against Him.

The Lord then gives as an aspect of His grace quails and manna to the people, verses 13–18. The migration of quails from Africa to the area of Canaan is a frequent thing. We would expect in the spring of the year that the birds are returning from their annual migration in Africa flying back through the same. There are pilgrim descriptions and other descriptions which bear out this account of those who have traveled this region. In the long flight it would be frequent that whole flocks of birds would settle in the sand as a resting place or be flying low. Nets would be put over them. Egyptians, by the way, ate their quails without the benefit of cooking them. Perhaps it was that Israel had picked up this trick as well.

The manna that was given was an omer. It is described as a fine flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. It seems evident from the text in Numbers that one of the things that happened to manna in order to eat it, was it was necessary to grind it up and to boil it and then eat it. An omer was about two quarts. So each person had that kind of daily ration which was given to them. A principle of equal distribution was used. In verses 17 and 18, particular verse 18: “He that gathered much had nothing over. And he that gathered little had no lack.” This is the text, by the way, that Paul referred to later in the 2 Corinthian letter when he talks about the fact that there should not be needy among the Christians. Because those who gathered much should have nothing left over and those who gathered little should have no lack. He uses this as an argument for the churches being able to help and assist those who are in evident financial need.

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The lesson is taught to us in verses 19–30 of the manna. The lesson in practical experience is that Israel, upon being given the command that they are to obey the Lord and not gather any more than they are to gather for each day, immediately disobeys and tries to gather more and save some up for the next day so that it rotted and had worms and stank. The manna, like the spiritual nourishment, which we take cannot be stored up. It must be received a day at a time.

There is a second disobedience, which is noted from verses 27–30. That is, some of the people decide on the Sabbath Day to go out and gather the manna. But they found that it was not there. The nature of manna is spoken of in verse 31: “It was like coriander seed, white. The taste of it was like wafers made with honey.” In Numbers 11 it is described as having the taste of something made with olive oil. Thus two different tastes described what it was like, one in Exodus and one in Numbers. Some of the rabbis in the age before Christ had a great deal of fun in trying to guess as to what the manna tasted like. They finally came up with the conclusion that the manna had wonderful properties that allowed its taste to change at will and suit every man’s tastes to his requirements. I like that. It may be strictly myth but it’s a neat idea.

The Lord certainly makes Christ suitable to each of our needs as well. We realize in the New Testament that Christ is a fitting representation of manna.

In 16:32–34, the manna is to be given a permanent memorialization in the history of Israel.

Although for the people it was not to be saved over, one omer was kept and it was later to be placed in the ark of the covenant. It was to be kept as memorial because of the Bible’s view of history, namely that all of God’s great deeds of the past have a significance for every generation. Something is not simply in the past disassociated with us in the present. But what God has done in the past is still a reminder to us of what God is doing now.

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The memorialization of the manna meant that we are to be reminded of the faithfulness of God so that at some point down the road we ourselves do not put God to the test. It was Israel putting God to the test in the wilderness that produced the manna. God was being gracious in giving the manna. And by the way, the literal meaning of “manna” is “What is it?” When the Children of Israel looked at this stuff on the ground they said, “What is it?” That’s why it came to be called “manna,” the “What-is-it?” food. Israel looked at this and realized that God had been gracious to them, even though they had put God to the test. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament will come along with a strong teaching that one is not to put God to the test by demanding of God anything when you are facing the extremities of life. Asking is one thing. Demanding is another. Thus Deuteronomy 8:3 is great commentary on this particular passage. In it Moses recounts forty years down the road the significance of the manna experience. “He humbled you and let you hunger. God let you hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone but that man lives by everything which proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

Do you recall when Jesus faced the temptation in the wilderness and He was without food for forty days? Satan came to Him and said, “Turn these stones into bread.” Jesus had the power to make it bread. He had a wilderness experience like the Children of Israel. But He would say to Satan, “You shall not test the Lord your God. You shall not put God to the test by believing in Him on the basis of some demand which you make of Him that He has to do or you will not believe.” Jesus refuses, therefore, to do the miracle on the ground of the Deuteronomy 8:3 verse connected with manna.

How well we need to learn this in the times of life when we are, so to speak, flat on our back whether it’s physically or spiritually and we say “God, I’ve served You up to now. I’ve been

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faithful. But God, if you don't come through this time and prove yourself to me this time then I won't believe in You at all." It's putting God to the test.

Jesus will declare Himself in John 6:48-51 as the true manna. Thus He declared, "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. The bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (NIV).

In the Old Testament, was manna needful for the body? Yes. In the New Testament is Christ, the living manna, needful for our spirit? Yes. In the Old Testament was manna given freely for all the camp of Israel? Were there any that were left out? Obviously no. In the New Testament, is Christ given for the world? The answer is obviously yes, "for whosoever will." Was the manna in the Old Testament so accessible that all the people had to do was stretch forth their hand and take it? Yes. It was that accessible. Is Christ so accessible to you that you need but to stretch forth your heart and your voice to Him and He is there? Yes, He's that accessible. He is the living bread, the living manna. In the Old Testament was it needful to gather the manna in order to have strength? Yes it was. In the New Testament is it needful to feed on Christ and His Word and His teaching and His life in order to have spiritual strength? Yes, it is. The manna was to last until the children of Israel entered Canaan. The beautiful day is described in Joshua 5:12. The children of Israel forty years down the road have entered Canaan and the crop of the spring is at hand and the manna is no longer needed and it is withdrawn.

So in this age we, like Paul, say, "We see through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13). We feed on the presence of Christ. We feed on the emblems, which represent Him, the bread and the cup.

We feed upon the Word and the sacraments of grace. But there will come a day when entering

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Canaan we will have a new food, a new food in Jesus Christ who we will see directly and have fact-to-face contact with. The manna is reminder to Israel that God will keep those whom He has redeemed.

### **III. A third crisis comes for Israel at Massah or Meribah according to Exodus 17:1–7.**

The test is really a two-part test. First of all, they are moving in the Wilderness of Sin by stages.

By the way, the “wilderness” just happens to be the name of the place, not the sin attached to it.

Moving by stages. Wouldn't it be nice if God would just hurry up and jam us through? Why does it have to take so long to get through all the problems in the wilderness? But inevitably it's stages. That's part of the test, relying upon God in each new situation.

The second part of this test is that in camping at Rephidim there is no water for the people to drink. Prior they had found bitter water, but now it is no water at all. Their rebellion against God is becoming deeper, for they are continuing to put God to the test. Thus it is evident here that in the rebellion they are now even ready to stone Moses. Something which they had not even contemplated before. But again, God shows His grace. At Marah, God gives them water. He commands Moses to go over to a rock to strike the rock and water comes out of it.

Again we are faced with the question of whether this miracle is a direct cause of God creating water in the rock that never was there or whether God uses a natural means to bring forth His glory. There are occasions, which have been recorded even in this century, of the shepherds in the area who have ability to find water in a rock. Water going through the wasteland actually flows underground. There is such a thing as hundreds of miles away water in the mountain collecting and running down and coming through a bed of rock. And running in that bed of rock until some place in the wilderness like, for example, an oasis, there is a fissure in the rock and the water comes up out of the ground. There have been occasions of water finders who have

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found rocks and smitten them with heavy instruments, cracking them and water pouring forth.

Because the surface of the rock is a very hard and glossy surface. But underneath that hard surface is a hard porous rock. The question is did God lead Moses to a method, which He Himself knew nothing of, but simply struck it and out of it pours water, or did God create the water there to begin with at that moment?

It really doesn't matter, does it, whether God uses the indirection or the direct thing? Because of how many links there are in the chain it doesn't matter. God is the ultimate cause. Whether He created the water or whether He helped Moses to find the water we're not specifically told. But water was there. And the people learned that again God would keep those whom He had led, whom He had redeemed.

The place is then called Massah and Meribah. Massah means "test." And Meribah means "strife." So is that the places in life where we camp and have trouble are known by the names which we give to them.

If we want to look at that place as a place of bitterness, as a place of disappointment and disillusionment, then that is what it will be called to us. That is what it will always be to us. But if we want to look upon the extremities of life as occasions in which God will do great works, then we have faith as we go into that situation that God will prove Himself faithful. Then the experience will be remembered to us as an experience of finding pleasantness and sweet waters and God's grace. And it will not become known as a place of strife or of contention or of bitterness. Even the cross of Jesus Christ will be remembered therefore by Jesus Christ not as the place of His defeat but as the place of His victory. He chose to look at the cross not from the standpoint of defeat but from the standpoint of winning. Paul's prison experience, which is so graphically described in Acts and in the prison epistles, will not be looked upon as the place of

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defeat, but the place from which the gospel was sounded forth unto the ends of the earth. The place from which God was alive and at work witnessing. The place where he was fettered but the Word of God was not fettered. The illnesses and the reverses of life can be looked upon, therefore, as a place of defeat or as a place of victory. It will depend upon how we want to assess them.

### **IV. The fourth crisis that is described in this passage of Scripture is the crisis with the sons of Amalek, chapter 17:8–15.**

In Deuteronomy 25:17–18, “Amalek,” Moses says, “attacked you on the way. When you were faint and weary he cut off at your rear all who lagged behind and he did not fear the Lord.” The source of the battle was the fact that Amalek attacked the weak and the stragglers of the camp, those who were most pressed down. Amalek himself was a grandson of Esau and the Amalekites were distant relatives of the Children of Israel. God will not have that kind of attack against His people when they are weak and faint. Therefore He resolves through Moses that Joshua should go forth into battle and that Moses should go up on the mountain, hold his hands up and as long as Moses’ hands were in the air the battle was on the side of Israel. When he dropped his hands, the battle went against him.

The lessons from this are exceedingly simple. Namely this: God right away is teaching Israel when it goes into battles that its conflicts will not be won in its own strength. But its conflicts will be resolved in the strength of the Lord. As long as (shown by the symbol of the upraised hands) there is the dependence upon the fact that the battle is the Lord’s, then the victory indeed will be theirs.

I think also Amalek represents for the Christian the first battle which we ourselves fight after being brought through redemption. Up to this time for Israel, God had provided redemption. God

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had given the Passover lamb. God had led through the sea. God had provided sweet waters where there were bitter wells. God had provided manna, Israel hadn't done that. God had given them water. Now for the first time they were invited to participate in the conflict. Yet even though they were invited to participate in the conflict, the resolution was not theirs. It was God's.

Perhaps the battle with Amalek reveals the struggle which Paul talks about in Romans 7, that we wrestle against the flesh. It is a work which we're involved in, that which attempts to defeat us on our way to Canaan. We realize that when we are done with our wrestling that unless God fights for us we cannot prevail.

There is a memorial which is erected for this battle. A memorial that God would blot out a remembrance of the Amalekites who struggled against the weakness of Israel and who did a terrible thing. That God would blot them out. We find, by the way, the last mention of an Amalekite in Scripture is the man Haman in the book of Esther who is described as an "Agagite" because Agag was the king of the Amalekites. We see the end of that generation in this experience centuries down the road.

**V. Finally, the last crisis which Israel faces in this experience in the Scripture is the crisis in regard to administration, chapter 18.**

It is preceded by a note of the narrator that Jethro, who is the father-in-law of Moses, meets Moses. He comes out into the area of the Sinai. Here the names of Moses' sons are given. Previously we've only seen the name of his one son, Gershom. Now we see the name of the other—Eliezer.

When Moses as an exile fled from Egypt forty years before and had met his wife, Jethro's daughter, they had a child. He'd called that son "Gershom," which means "a stranger here."

That's the way he felt. But the time their second son came along, and we don't know how much

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time intervened, it may have been years, but by the time his second son came along his attitude toward life had changed and he said, “God is my help.”

I'd like to say that to all the visitors today. In all the times when you find yourself in a new place and you have not yet discovered whether God is going to meet you there or not, and you feel like a stranger, if you'll stay wherever God has for you to stay, wherever that be, you'll eventually be able to look at that experience not as an alien experience, not as a banishment experience, but you'll be able to look at it as “God is my help.” And there will be treasure that God will put into your experience which will help transform the strangeness into the reality of His own presence with you. Moses had sent his wife and his sons back and they had not been with him in the deliverance because of his wife's rebellion against him. But now they have come back. Jethro brings them back to Moses. And furthermore Jethro himself comes into Moses' tent. Jethro upon hearing all that God has done makes a significant confession of faith. Perhaps it was that Jethro believed in many gods. But when Moses is through with his account of the God of Israel, Jethro is ready to say that this God is God alone and sacrifices and offerings are made to Him.

Then the next day, verse 13, Moses goes out after the time of meeting with his father-in-law to judge the people. The crisis in his administration of leadership is so graphically shown in this particular passage. 18:13–16 describes Jethro's evaluation of Moses' administration. The first thing he saw was that Moses sat and the second thing he saw was that the people stood. That's the wrong way for leadership to conduct itself with its people. Moses sat. If he only took ten minutes for every person who would come to him with a problem it would mean that in the course of ten hours of straight sitting he could only get to 60 people. In ten days he could only get to 600 people. In 30 days he could only get to 1800 people. Without taking a day off. After 365 days of working only giving 10 minutes to each person he would only have gotten to 21,900

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persons and he's got a little over two million people to come to grips with and to help. At 22,000 people per year it would have taken Moses 100 years just for 10 minutes with every person that was in the camp. And he didn't have 100 years to give. Besides, 10 minutes isn't very good qualitative time.

Moses sat. Meanwhile the people are standing. As long as Moses is sitting there is no time for him to give broad leadership direction to the people. There is no time for him to think and pray. There is no criteria for Moses for separating the good from the bad. From separating the urgent needs from the important needs. The people are standing. They're unused to freedom. They have been pushed around as slaves. With all of their problems perhaps they need a trained panel of psychiatrists to assist them. All of the issues are important, crucial to be settled. But are they that important that they should concern Moses?

So Jethro, when he sees Moses sitting and the people standing all day long, comes up with the ultimate question, "Why?" He does not jump to conclusions. Maybe Moses has some good reasons for running his administration that way. Moses respects his father-in-law and answers him. Notice the defensiveness of him as a leader. All of us who serve in the capacity of leadership have the propensity to be defensive when questions are asked. "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute they come to me and I decide between a man and his neighbor and I make them know the statutes and decisions." In other words, Jethro, they can't get along without me.

Jethro is going to say to Moses, "Sometime the day is going to come along without you." Jethro makes to Moses some recommendations. He discerns the problem, first of all. He says to Moses, "You are going to wear out if you keep on doing this." Moses, in effect, needs to get to Sinai where he can speak to God for forty days and be away from the people. He doesn't have time to

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do anything if he is going to be doing this all the time. Not only will Moses wear out, but Jethro tells Moses that the people are going to wear out. They're going to be dead before Moses can get to every one of them. But most importantly, their existence as a people is threatened if they have a leader who will not change his administrative behavior and learn to delegate responsibility and authority. Thus Jethro proposes a solution to Moses: *You're to do four things. First, you are to represent the people to God. You're to be their priest. You're to carry their needs before the Lord.* By the way, if Moses didn't take the people to God, I think Moses would have had the temptation to give up. Because one of the things he was seeing as a leader was the raw and difficult edges of people, their sins and their failures. If he didn't remember that God cared for them and God loved them with a deep love it might be he'd simply throw his hands up in the air and walk away from the task. Moses represented the people before God. That's the task of spiritual leadership.

*Second, Moses, you are to teach the statutes and the ordinances. You are to teach the principles and the practices of living.* Thus Moses is given the specific command that he is to teach the people the way in which they should walk. Then he is to teach them what they must do. That's the application of the principles.

*Third, Moses, you must delegate responsibility and authority.* He is to select others. He's to select able men—persons who are strong. He's to select men who fear God, who are trustworthy and who hate bribes. And he's to put these into divisions of responsibility over the people so that there might be a concern for each person's needs going through the appropriate channels.

*Finally Moses, set up a court of appeal in the event that some of those who are set up on the lower levels are not able to handle a case.* The result of this whole reorganization of administration was that it would be easier for Moses. It would be easier for the people. And not

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only that, Moses would endure and the people would have peace because their problems were being solved and Moses' stamina and strength were intact.

I want again to point out something interesting of Jethro's word to Moses. Moses did not receive the commands for reorganization of his administration from God at Sinai. It was not God who said to him directly, "Moses change the way you're doing things." God did speak face to face with Moses on many occasions, but it was not God's speaking face to face here to Moses, which changed him around. It was human wisdom. The best and finest wisdom coming through a man who himself was not a member of the community of Israel who said to Moses, "You need to learn some things."

God really does give us two sources of knowledge. A divine source of knowledge, which we find in His Word and in prayer and in the company of God's people, and from time to time wisdom which comes simply from man. It is this wisdom from man which Moses here uses to effect a better way.

### **VI. How do we take these five crises and see where we're at in our own lives?**

**A.** First, the crisis at Marah. Is there anything you're facing right now which when you first went into it appeared to give you such promise of delight and happiness? Being in it you have found it to be a bitter well. Would you take the bitterness of that experience—a job, a new house, some promise broken, some rearrange, marriage, even children can be this way. Children when they're small can be looked at with such great promise, such delight. Maybe as they grow older they might be rebellious. What seemed to be an oasis of help has now become a bitter stream. Take the tree, the cross of Jesus Christ's life, and cast it into the bitterness of your life and let His suffering for you sweeten the experience and give you refreshing water to drink.

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**B.** Are you facing a time in your life when you have run out of stamina, run out of strength? Like Israel ran out of food in the wilderness and you wonder where am I going to grab the next piece of strength to get me through? God has manna for you. Jesus has said of himself, “Come, take and eat of Me.” You will find Him enough to meet your need.

**C.** Is there a place in life where you have run out of water? Where you are striving and contending, disillusioned and bitter and the mainsprings of your life have been without oil? You are just in the crunch of exhausting circumstances and you feel totally defenseless without resources. Your life has become bitter. Allow Jesus Christ to be your rock. Paul talks about Jesus Christ as the rock that was with Israel in the wilderness. There is an open life of healing from Him to you which if you will call upon Him and ask of Him, He will give you a source of healing and supply of water. Water which will never run out. Water which will be in you as a stream, as a river of praise before His throne. The Lord wants to unleash the river of praise that is in your own heart. Often that river of praise that is in you can be there, but it can be covered by a hard substance, a hard heart, a thin shell of hardness. The Lord Jesus wants to take the rod that is in His hand and tap the hardness which is around you and break that hardness so that the real river of His Spirit which is in you might flow forth and give you release and satisfaction.

**D.** Are you contending with a battle you’re involved in? A war against the flesh? A war against circumstances which, without God’s help, will overcome you? Rest and rely in His strength.

**E.** Maybe your need is simply one of organization. Maybe your life is just disorganized. You don’t get up regularly, you don’t eat regularly, you don’t work regularly, you don’t sleep regularly, you don’t discipline yourself regularly. You just do things kind of hodge-podge. You don’t feel free. You don’t feel you’re going in any direction at all. Nothing significant is being

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accomplished. You're jammed up like Moses. Take some human wisdom—get organized. The Lord is for you and will help you.