

HE THAT BELIEVETH

When the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt, they cried out in anguish. They did not cry out to God; yet, God heard their cries, and, because of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He would deliver them. God commanded Moses to tell the people that He would bring them out of Egypt, and into the land of Canaan, just as He had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses feared that the people might not believe that God had sent Him, so God commanded Moses to perform certain miracles, to prove that God had sent him. Moses and Aaron, his brother, gathered the elders of Israel, and Aaron told them what God had said to Moses, and Moses performed the miracles God had commanded him, and the people believed. (Exodus 4:29–31) Moses commanded Pharaoh to let the people go, but, and God had told Moses in advance Pharaoh refused. So, God, in an awesome display of His power, brought against Egypt ten terrible plagues. Pharaoh was finally brought to his knees, and he let the people go. Yet, Pharaoh had a change of heart, and pursued the Israelites until he had them trapped before the Red Sea. God parted the red sea so that the Israelites crossed to safety, and then God caused the waters to cover Pharaoh and his army, drowning them all. Afterward, Moses extolled the power of God, singing:

Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation. (Exodus 15:11–13)

In the Exodus, God demonstrated both His fidelity and His power. He proved that He is both willing, and able to give to His covenant people what they need.

After the Exodus, Moses led the Israelites into the wilderness of Shur, and, after they had journeyed for several days, they found no water. They finally found water, but it was too bitter to drink. The Scriptures say, “And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” (Exodus 15:24) The Israelites, when they could find no water to drink, grumbled against Moses, but they were really grumbling against God. So, God told Moses to cut down a certain tree, and cast it into the water, and, when Moses did as God commanded, the water became sweet, and fit to drink. Then God brought them to a place called Elim, and there they found twelve wells of water, and forty-six palm trees. In this God tested the faith of Israel, whether they would trust Him, and obey Him, or not.

Then Moses led the people into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai, and the people again grumbled against Moses and Aaron, but they really grumbled against the Lord. They said, “Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (Exodus 16:3) The people were hungry, and, instead of calling on God, or upon Moses, they bitterly complained about their circumstance. They said that they would rather God had killed them with full bellies in Egypt with full bellies, than kill them by hunger in the wilderness. They had bad faith, and believed that God would let them die for lack of food. So, God promised that He would provide for them bread to eat. (Exodus 16:8) The Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.” (Exodus 16:4) Moses told the people that, for six days in a week, God would rain bread from heaven, and they should every day gather the bread to eat that day. On the sixth day, they should gather for two days, for God would give no bread

to gather on the seventh. The next day, God sent the bread as promised, and the people gathered, and everyone had enough. Moses told them not to store any, but some did, and the next day the stored bread had worms, and stunk. On the sixth day, the people gather enough for that day, and the next. Moses told them to eat what they would that day, and what remained would not spoil, and they could eat it the next day. Yet, on the Sabbath day, some went out to gather bread, and found none. So God said to Moses, “How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?” (Exodus 16:28) As God tested the people in the wilderness of Shur, so He tested them in the wilderness of Sin, and, as some failed at Shur, so some failed at Sin.

After this, Moses led the people to Rephidim. There was no water for them there, and they quarreled with Moses, saying, “Give us water that we may drink.” (Exodus 17:2) Moses answered, “Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?” (Exodus 17:2) They said to Moses, “Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” The people asked why Moses delivered them from Egypt just to kill them in the desert. The people complained against Moses, but they really complained against God who told Moses what to do. God told Moses to gather the elders of Israel, to go to a rock that God would show Him, and to strike the rock with His rod, the same rod with which he struck the river Nile, and water would come out of the rock. Moses did exactly as the Lord commanded him, and all the elders were witnesses. Moses called the place Massah, which means *trial*, and also Meribah, which means *quarrell*, because “because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?” (Exodus 17:7)

At Mount Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel in which He promised that, if they would obey His law, then He would be their God, and the people did agree. So, God gave them His law, the Ten Commandments. Then Moses went up Mount Sinai for forty days to receive further instruction from the Lord. When Moses did not immediately return, the people gathered together, and said to Aaron, “Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.” (Exodus 32:1) Their complaint was not against Moses, however, but against God. In Moses’s absence, they commanded Aaron to make graven images so that they might worship them, and Aaron did as they commanded. This breach of trust was so great, that God plagued the people.

When the Israelites were near enough to the promised land, Moses sent twelve spies to reconnoiter. After forty days, the spies returned, and ten reported to Moses, and Aaron, and the people, that the land was good, but Israel could not take possession of it. Caleb dissented from the majority report, and said that they were able to take possession of it, and they should set out at once. The people adopted the majority report, and complained against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. (Numbers 14:2–4) The people either believed that God was not able to preserve them, or that He was not willing to do so. They doubted either God’s power, or His faithfulness. Either way, the people failed to trust God. They talked of replacing Moses with another leader, but they really desired to replace God. Moses and Aaron appealed to the people to trust God, and to obey Him by venturing into the promised land, but the people rebelled, and agreed to stone Moses and Aaron to death. God said to Moses, “How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?” (Numbers 14:11) God had, time and again, proven both His power and His faithfulness, proven that He is both willing and able to provide what His people need. Yet, the Israelites sinfully doubted God. Their unbelief greatly angered God, and He would have destroyed them if not for the intercession of Moses and Aaron. Ten times the people tested God. He would keep His promise, and bring the Israelites into the promised land, but not the generation of Israelites that doubted Him. That wicked generation He doomed to wander in the wilderness until they died there.

In Israel's wanderings, they traveled from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea, around, and not through, the land of Edom. It was an arduous journey, and the people once again complained against Moses, and against God. They said, "Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread." (Numbers 21:5) God was angry with them, and punished them for their grumbling. The Scriptures say, "And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died." (Numbers 21:6) The faithless complaining of the Israelites was so wicked that God killed many of them because of it. The Scriptures then say, "Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people." (Numbers 21:7) The surviving Israelites acknowledged their sins. They confessed to Moses that they had sinned against him, and against God. They repented, and asked Moses to pray to the Lord to remove the serpents that were their just punishment. Moses, seeing their repentance, did ask God to forgive them, and to bring an end to the plague. God told Moses what He should do. The Lord said to Moses, "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." (Numbers 21:8) God told Moses to make a replica of the fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole. If any man was bitten, then had merely to look upon the serpent on the pole, and by his looking he would live, and not die. Moses did as God told Him, and so did the people, and so the punishment was brought to an end.

After that unbelieving generation died, Moses brought the Israelites to the promised land, the land of Canaan. Canaan was not a wilderness, but 'a land of milk and honey,' a land in which God would greatly prosper them. Moses warned them:

And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 6:10–13)

The Israelites would, at God's command, and by His power, drive the heathen nations out of the promised land, and take possession of all that the inhabitants would leave behind. The Israelites would possess great wealth for which they did not work, and they would be tempted to forget the God who gave it to them, and to serve other gods. Moses said:

Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah. Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, To cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the LORD hath spoken. (Deuteronomy 6:14–19)

The Israelites would finally cross the river Jordan, and enter into the promised land. Moses warned the Israelites not to test God as they did at Massah. If they would keep all His commandments, then God would help them to conquer the land, and to drive out the inhabitants.

Then Moses said:

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. (Deuteronomy 8:2, 3)

God, in the Exodus, had proved both His power and his faithfulness. He had proved His faithfulness to His people, and He would prove their faithfulness to Him. So, he tested them to see whether they would trust Him, and obey Him, or not. God allowed them to hunger and to thirst, so that they might keenly feel their need of Him, and trust Him to meet their needs. Yet, when the people needed food and water, they did not cry out to God for help; they rather complained against Him. God tested them, to see whether they would trust Him, and do as He desired, but they tested Him to see if He would do what they desired, and so they failed the test. They did not trust God, and they did not obey Him.

Jesus explained to Nicodemus the significance of the bronze serpent. He said:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John 3:14–21)

The serpent in the garden of Eden caused the death of mankind, so God told the serpent, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15) The serpents in the wilderness caused the deaths of the Israelites, so God told Moses to mount its likeness on a stake. God would give His people life by destroying the cause of death. The people could not merit this salvation, they could only look to the cause of it. Just as the bronze serpent was lifted up on a stake, so would Jesus be. Jesus would save His people by becoming the cause of their death. Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:17; compare Romans 8:3) If a man would be right with God, then he need only look to Jesus for forgiveness of his sins. God loved the world by giving for the world what He most loved, His Only-begotten Son, so that anyone who believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it. Anyone that believes in Jesus is not

condemned by God, but rather is right with God; if a man does not believe in Jesus, then he stands condemned. Jesus is the light of the world, and He came into the world to dispel the darkness of sin and ignorance. Sinful men love darkness, however. They love their sin, and they suppress the truth that God has through His creation made known to all mankind. The sinner hates the light of Jesus, because that light exposes his sin. The Christian, however, does good, and so he is not afraid of the light, but rather welcomes it, because it shows his deeds to be good, and done with the help of God.

Every man comes into the world “dead in trespasses and sin.” (Ephesians 2:1) They have no spiritual life, and are bound for hell. They cannot save themselves; only God can save them. Saint Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4–10)

God is merciful. Before a man is a Christian, when he is sinful, God loves Him, and has mercy on Him. When he is helpless, and cannot save Himself, God graciously saves him. God joins him to Christ, and thereby joins him to Christ’s resurrection and ascension, so that the man becomes spiritually alive. God does this so that He might show great is his mercy. God saves a man, by His grace, through the man’s faith. All of this is God’s doing, not the man’s; it is a gift of God’s grace. It is not something a man can earn, else a man could boast in what he had done; but all boasting belongs to God. The Christian is a work of God. God makes a man new in Christ, not because the man did good works, but so that he will do them. Before God saves a man, He ordains that the man should do good works. If a man has no good works, then he has not been saved by grace through faith. Jesus asks a man to believe Him. If a man believes Jesus, then He will obey Him. God has proven Himself faithful to His people, and He requires that they be faithful to Him

Let us learn from the history of God’s people, Israel. Let us look to Jesus for our salvation. Let us be faithful to God, as He is faithful to us.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen.