*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

July 20 - 25

*Exodus Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen*

**Monday, July 20 Exodus 15:22-27**

*“The water was too bitter to drink”*

 Israel has crossed the Red Sea and will remain in the desert for the remainder of the book of Exodus. Not until the third chapter of the book of Joshua will they cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. To use an analogy, if Israel’s departure from Egypt is her birth, she is now in her period of infancy, the beginning where God is taking his people by the hand and teaching them patiently and lovingly about who he is and what he has in store for them. These stories, therefore, are not just about the complaining of God’s people, but God’s care for them.

 No sooner do the Israelites leave Egypt under the most miraculous of events than they, within one month of their departure, lapse into an old pattern. They again use their own perception of their circumstances as the standard by which to base reality. They still have not learned that even though they are in a desert with no food or water, God is above their circumstances. So they grumble. But God uses their grumbling as an occasion not to punish his people, but to teach them something about himself.

*How quickly we forget, Lord, what you have done for us. Amen.*

**Tuesday, July 21 Exodus 16:1-36**

*“I’m going to rain down food for you”*

 The Israelites arrive in the desert of Sin and immediately begin grumbling against Moses and Aaron, bringing what is an absurd charge against their leaders: “You have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” Only the most callused heart or the most stupid mind could conceive such a ridiculous charge. The only thing more surprising, perhaps, is the response God gives. Rather than punish them, he rains down bread from heaven. If any need convincing of the grace of God in the Old Testament, they need only to look here.

 God provides, but there are stipulations. They are only to gather as much bread as they need for each day, with the Sabbath being the reason for gathering twice as much bread on the sixth day. This is a test, to see if they will follow God’s instructions. Notice that neither they *nor* God work on the Sabbath as God refrains from supplying the food. Keeping the Sabbath is something God does and the Israelites are expected to follow suit. This pattern is rooted in creation itself. The Israelites rest because God did.

*We need to learn to trust you, Lord, to provide our daily bread. Amen.*

**Wednesday, July 22 Exodus 17:1-7**

*“Is the Lord with us?”*

 Once again the Israelites complain about the lack of water. To have two similar episodes so close to each other in the story points out the absurdity of Israel’s lack of trust in God. Like Pharaoh before them, how many times do they need to see God work before they understand? They still do not see that he has their best interests in mind, that he has moved mightily to bring them to this place, and he will not let a little thing like a water supply stand in the way.

 The people grumble against Moses who responds by reminding them that a complaint against him is really a complaint against God. But Moses cries out to God with a complaint of his own. God patiently instructs Moses to strike a rock with the staff with which he struck the Nile. The imagery is clear. The water from the rock is another Exodus-like event. The power that has brought the Israelites out of Egypt is the same power that is sustaining them in the desert and that will bring them, eventually, safely into the land God promised to Abraham. The desert is a hostile place, as was Egypt, but both are at God’s command.

*The world can be a hostile place, Lord, but you hold us safely in your hands. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

July 20 - 25

*Exodus Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen*

**Thursday, July 23 Exodus 17:8-16**

*“The warriors of Amalek attacked them”*

 The attack of the Israelites by the Amalekites is the first such military encounter for the recently freed slaves, through it will not be the last. The defeat of the Egyptian army at the sea did not end outside hostility toward Israel. Egypt only tried to prevent their departure. Now the Amalekites are poised to prevent their journey and eventual arrival in Canaan. If they succeed, the Exodus may just as well have never happened.

 The conflict introduces us to Joshua, Moses’ battle leader. Joshua’s appearance here foreshadows the many military encounters the Israelites will have later on, especially during the Conquest of Canaan when Joshua will be leading the Israelites. As Joshua and his fighting men engage the Amalekites, Moses goes up to the top of a hill and raises his hands. As long as his hands are raised (in prayer? – we are not told), the Israelites are winning but when his arms come down due to fatigue they begin to falter. With Aaron and Hur holding Moses’ hands up until sunset, total victory goes to the Israelites.

*You are at war, Lord, with those who oppose your people. Amen.*

**Friday, July 24 Exodus 18:1-12**

*“Jethro came to visit Moses”*

 The word of God’s victory over Egypt has spread so as to reach his father-in-law Jethro’s ears. Unlike the surrounding nations who tremble at the news (15:14-16), Jethro is attracted to it, and so he comes to Moses bringing Moses’ wife and sons. The names of Moses’ sons give a concrete reminder of where Moses and the Israelites have been. Gershom who is a reminder not only that Moses was a foreigner in Midian, but that the Israelites experienced a similar alienation in Egypt. Eliezer is a reminder of deliverance, not only for Moses but for Israel.

 Upon hearing the news of God’s mighty acts in Egypt, Jethro praises God. What is happening here? Is this “priest of Midian” who has been a worshipper of the gods of Midian a convert to the God of the Hebrews? Perhaps so, but at the very least we can say that he has had a shift in thinking based on what God has done for Israel, ironically a realization that Israel itself is often slow to learn. Although neither the Egyptians nor the Amalekites get it, Jethro, the Midianite, has learned the lesson of the Exodus: “The Lord is greater than all other gods.”

*May the word of your mighty acts, Lord, be spread throughout the world. Amen.*

**Saturday, July 25 Exodus 18:13-27**

 *“Let me give you a word of advice”*

 Jethro advises Moses to divide the labor of judging the people’s disputes. Moses is said to judge, which in context means arbitrating legal issues between parties based on the standard of God’s decrees and laws. This adjudication between parties proves too much for Moses. He is dead tired after keeping up the pace all day. Jethro sees what is happening to his son-in-law and offers sound advice: Get some help.

 Jethro’s advice is fairly detailed and may indicate that he had experience in these matters, being a priest. (1) Moses is to have superiority over his chosen helpers in that he is the people’s representative before God and is to teach the people God’s laws. (2) Moses is to select capable men, each of whom is to act as judge over an assigned group of people for the simple cases; Moses will get only the difficult ones. These “capable men” are to be men who fear God, who are trustworthy and who hate dishonest gain. The explicit reference to dishonest gain anticipates a common temptation of leadership, namely, bribery.

*Thank you, Lord, for caring people who give us good advice. Amen.*