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Prison Ministry

**Story of Redemption** (1947) Chapter **17: Israel's Journeyings**

THE children of Israel traveled in the wilderness and for three days could find no good water to drink. They were suffering with thirst, "and the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord that healeth thee."

The children of Israel seemed to possess an evil heart of unbelief. They were unwilling to endure hardships in the wilderness. When they met with difficulties in the way, they would regard them as impossibilities. Their confidence in God would fail, and they could see nothing before them but death. "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: and the children of Israel said unto them, 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."

They had not really suffered the pangs of hunger. They had food for the present, but they feared for the future. They could not see how the host of Israel was to subsist, in their long travels through the wilderness, upon the simple food they then had, and in their unbelief they saw their children famishing. The Lord was willing that they should be brought short in their food, and that they should meet with difficulties, that their hearts should turn to Him who had hitherto helped them, that they might believe in Him. He was ready to be to them a present help. If, in their want, they would call upon Him, He would manifest to them tokens of His love and continual care.

But they seemed to be unwilling to trust the Lord any further than they could witness before their eyes the continual evidences of His power. If they had possessed true faith and a firm confidence in God, inconveniences and obstacles, or even real suffering, would have been cheerfully borne, after the Lord had wrought in such a wonderful manner for their deliverance from servitude. Moreover, the Lord promised them if they would obey His commandments, no disease should rest upon them, for He said, "I am the Lord that healeth thee."

After this sure promise from God it was criminal unbelief in them to anticipate that they and their children might die with hunger. They had suffered greatly in Egypt by being overtaxed in labor. Their children had been put to death, and in answer to their prayers of anguish, God had mercifully delivered them. He promised to be their God, to take them to Himself as a people and to lead them to a large and good land.

But they were ready to faint at any suffering they should have to endure in the way to that land. They had endured much in the service of the Egyptians, but now could not endure suffering in the service of God. They were ready to give up to gloomy doubts and sink in discouragement when they were tried. They murmured against God's devoted servant Moses and charged him with all their trials, and expressed a wicked wish that they had remained in Egypt, where they could sit by the flesh pots and eat bread to the full.

**A Lesson for Our Day**

The unbelief and murmurings of the children of Israel illustrate the people of God now upon the earth. Many look back to them, and marvel at their unbelief and continual murmurings, after the Lord had done so much for them, in giving them repeated evidences of His love and care for them. They think that they should not have proved ungrateful. But some who thus think, murmur and repine at things of less consequence. They do not know themselves. God frequently proves them, and tries their faith in small things; and they do not endure the trial any better than did ancient Israel.

Many have their present wants supplied; yet they will not trust the Lord for the future. They manifest unbelief and sink into despondency and gloom at anticipated want. Some are in continual trouble lest they shall come to want and their children suffer. When difficulties arise or when they are brought into strait places--when their faith and their love to God are tested--they shrink from the trial and murmur at the process by which God has chosen to purify them. Their love does not prove pure and perfect, to bear all things.

The faith of the people of the God of heaven should be strong, active, and enduring--the substance of things hoped for. Then the language of such will be, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name," for He hath dealt bountifully with me.

Self-denial is considered by some to be real suffering. Depraved appetites are indulged. And a restraint upon the unhealthy appetites would lead even many professed Christians to now start back, as though actual starvation would be the consequence of a plain diet. And, like the children of Israel, they would prefer slavery, diseased bodies, and even death, rather than to be deprived of the flesh pots. Bread and water is all that is promised to the remnant in the time of trouble.

**The Manna**

"And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat. This is the thing which the Lord hath commanded, Gather of it every man, according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents.

"And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating. And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not to Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them. And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted.

"And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the Lord hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over, lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that today; for today is a Sabbath unto the Lord: today ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none."

The Lord is no less particular now in regard to His Sabbath than when He gave the foregoing special directions to the children of Israel. He required them to bake that which they would bake, and seethe (that is, boil) that which they would seethe, on the sixth day, preparatory to the rest of the Sabbath.

God manifested His great care and love for His people in sending them bread from heaven. "Man did eat angels' food"; that is, food provided for them by the angels. The threefold miracle of the manna--a double quantity on the sixth day, and none on the seventh, and its keeping fresh through the Sabbath, while on other days it would become unfit for use--was designed to impress them with the sacredness of the Sabbath.

After they were abundantly supplied with food, they were ashamed of their unbelief and murmurings, and promised to trust the Lord for the future, but they soon forgot their promise and failed at the first trial of their faith.

**Water From the Rock**

They journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, and pitched in Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. "Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the Lord? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb, and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?"

God directed the children of Israel to encamp in that place, where there was no water, to prove them, to see if they would look to Him in their distress, or murmur as they had previously done. In view of what God had done for them in their wonderful deliverance, they should have believed in Him in their distress. They should have known that He would not permit them to perish with thirst, whom He had promised to take unto Himself as His people. But instead of entreating the Lord in humility to provide for their necessity, they murmured against Moses, and demanded of him water.

God had been continually manifesting His power in a wonderful manner before them, to make them understand that all the benefits they received came from Him; that He could give them, or remove them, according to His own will. At times they had a full sense of this, and humbled themselves greatly before the Lord; but when thirsty or when hungry, they charged it all upon Moses, as though they had left Egypt to please him. Moses was grieved with their cruel murmurings. He inquired of the Lord what he should do, for the people were ready to stone him. The Lord bade him go smite the rock with the rod of God. The cloud of His glory rested directly before the rock. "He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers." Psalm 78:15, 16.

Moses smote the rock, but it was Christ who stood by him and caused the water to flow from the flinty rock. The people tempted the Lord in their thirst, and said, If God has brought us out here, why does He not give us water, as well as bread. That if showed criminal unbelief and made Moses afraid that God would punish them for their wicked murmurings. The Lord tested the faith of His people, but they did not endure the trial. They murmured for food and for water, and complained of Moses. Because of their unbelief, God suffered their enemies to make war with them, that He might manifest to His people from whence cometh their strength.

**Delivered From Amalek**

"Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun."

Moses held up his hands toward heaven, with the rod of God in his right hand, entreating help from God. Then Israel prevailed and drove back their enemies. When Moses let down his hands, it was seen that Israel soon lost all they had gained, and were being overcome by their enemies. Moses again held up his hands toward heaven, and Israel prevailed, and the enemy was driven back.

This act of Moses, reaching up his hands toward God, was to teach Israel that while they made God their trust and laid hold upon His strength and exalted His throne, He would fight for them and subdue their enemies. But when they should let go their hold upon His strength and should trust to their own power, they would be even weaker than their enemies, who had not the knowledge of God, and their enemies would prevail over them. Then "Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi: for he said, Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." If the children of Israel had not murmured against the Lord, He would not have suffered their enemies to make war with them.

**Jethro's Visit**

Before Moses left Egypt he had sent back his wife and children to his father-in-law. And after Jethro heard of the wonderful deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, he visited Moses in the wilderness, and brought his wife and children to him. "And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent. And Moses told his father in law all that the Lord had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the Lord delivered them.

"And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly He was above them. And Jethro, Moses' father in law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God."

Jethro's discerning eye soon saw that the burdens upon Moses were very great, as the people brought all their matters of difficulty to him, and he instructed them in regard to the statutes and law of God. He said to Moses, "Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: and thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: and let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace.

"So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard cases they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves. And Moses let his father in law depart; and he went his way into his own land."

Moses was not above being instructed by his father-in-law. God had exalted him greatly and wrought wonders by his hand. Yet Moses did not reason that God had chosen him to instruct others, and had accomplished wonderful things by his hand, and he therefore needed not to be instructed. He gladly listened to the suggestions of his father-in-law, and adopted his plan as a wise arrangement.

Next Mailing: Story of Redemption Chapter **18: The Law of God**