

Moses and the Tests of God

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Date: 05 May 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Jesus as the bread of life. So, let's think about a few things together. Let's think, first of all, about the grumbling that we see here at the end of chapter 15 and then the beginning of chapter 16. It's a reminder, this text is a reminder that spiritual amnesia is real. Here is a people with short-term memory. They have forgotten all that God has been for them, all that God has done for them.

We often forget all the ways God has been faithful to us, all that He has done for us in the Lord Jesus. Spiritual children don't always trust our Father in heaven. Rather, we can be like the stories that you've maybe heard of street children who are adopted into safe and secure families, but they can't quickly learn to trust. So, they hoard their possessions and they live in constant fear of being abandoned. A hard process of learning to trust. It's what we see with Israel in the wilderness. I think it's a struggle in every Christian, in every church, that struggle to remember and to trust. If you look at verse 1, it's important because it gives us a time stamp.

And so, as they're on the journey, this is the fifteenth day of the second month after they'd come out of Egypt. So, this is when they begin to grumble. If we, like them, if we forget our past, then we're going to end up grumbling. They've just been singing a song, God has saved us. He's worked so many miracles. Chapter 15, verse 2. Chapter 15, verse 13. God has been our Redeemer. Slaves bound for death, but we've been set free. God has just revealed Himself as the Lord who heals, not just the water, but who heals His people. Verse 26. He has graciously provided an oasis in the desert.

If we forget all that God has done for us in our spiritual experience, like them, don't we find ourselves grumbling in the present?

The Israelites said to Moses and Aaron in verse 3, If only we died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat round pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted. Life was great in Egypt. We had food. Really? They'd forgotten that they were slaves, being worked to death. They enjoyed Elam. There was no grumbling there. They had lots of shade, lots of food. There was plenty. There was contentment. But in the desert, when the pilgrim life gets hard, that's when grumbling begins. Testing God. God, I don't feel like you measure up. God, I'd like more evidence that you actually argued. I can't see any purpose in this testing. If we forget all that God has done for us in the past, all that He continues to do for us in the Lord Jesus by His Spirit in the present, we will turn to grumbling, struggling to see a purpose in testing. Boys and girls, I was thinking about butterflies and the way butterflies come out of cocoons. And sometimes when people come across a butterfly trying to get out of a cocoon, and it takes lots of hours of fluttering and flapping of wings, it can seem such a desperate process. People are tempted to take a knife and to open the cocoon to help the butterfly get out. Should we help the butterfly in that test as it has to fight to get out? The answer is no, because part of that fighting and that flapping is for its good. It actually releases chemicals that serve to strengthen the wings. If the butterfly comes out too early, it misformed—it's not a word—it won't survive.

[4 : 2 9] Our God uses testing to grow strength, to give strength, and we need to receive that and to be ready to trust Him. So, when we think about the pilgrim story back then, and we think about our story today, as we are on that journey of faith, if we're on the journey of faith, where we're going to be in a situation where either we're preparing for trials that will come, or we're in the heat of testing right now, there are two things that we can learn from the Israelites. One, this warning against grumbling.

I think especially important is verse 7. In the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because He has heard your grumbling against Him. When we grumble about and against our circumstances, we are grumbling against God. Why? Because the Bible tells us God is in control of all things.

Nothing comes into our lives apart from our Father's hands. And so, we are invited to rest and to trust the reality of Romans 8, 28, that all things work together for good for those who love Him, even when we don't see how, even when those circumstances and testing seem so hard. Every test becomes for us an invitation to pray, an invitation to depend, an invitation to grow. How can I walk by faith and not by sight?

A chance to put on display as the people of God, a sense that God's grace for us, God's faithfulness to us in the Lord Jesus, the reality of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, that can keep us in peace, that can help us bear patiently. It can really surprise a watching world when Christians go through testing, trusting in God, giving praise to God. So, there's a warning against grumbling, and there's an encouragement to remembering. And we say this a few times, and Moses keeps repeating it in his books, and it's through the whole Old Testament. Christians need to know our history. We need to know the stories in the Bible of God's faithfulness, to know the stories of God's wise purposes, to recognize that this is part of our story, that the God who was able to feed the Israelites in the wilderness is the God who's able to provide for me today. Every personal story that we have of being able to look back and say, yes, that was hard, but God kept me. God brought me through. God even helped me to rejoice.

We need to remember those stories, we need to remember those stories, and to share those stories, to increase and encourage us in our faith. And we need the gospel story of God's loving faithfulness to us in Jesus, to recognize that all our needs, our great spiritual need is gloriously met in Jesus.

[7 : 53] Our need to be forgiven, our need to be reconciled, our need to be brought home to God, all met in and through the Lord Jesus. And to understand, like the story of Daniel's three friends when they were thrown into the fire, fire of testing, who else was there? One like the Son of Man, Jesus was there. Jesus, the one who would then go into the fire of testing for us at the cross to save us, is the God who's always with us in the heat of the trials that we face.

So, there's lessons for us from their grumbling. There's also lessons from their testing. So, it's basic for us to remember that the testing that God gives here has a purpose in view, just like every class test has a purpose. Are the pupils and students keeping up? Are they retaining information? Are they able to transmit it? God's spiritual test, the purpose is stated, verse 4, I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.

God tests his people. Will we walk by faith? Will we trust God's Word? Will we trust God our Father?

Israel finds themselves in an interesting place. So, they're halfway between Elam, this wonderful oasis. They're halfway between Elam and Sinai. Sinai, where they're going to meet with God, they're going to receive the national covenant. But right now, they're in the wilderness, they're in a hard place. But God has taken them there. God, who is wise and good, has taken them there, is testing them to teach them to grow in their dependence and their trust. And God will do the same for us. He gives them two tests related to gathering. In verse 16, there's that first test, give us today our daily bread. This is what the Lord has commanded. Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent. So, God was going to miraculously rain down this bread that would form from dew. And the people were instructed, gather enough for each person within your family group. Eat it that day and trust God to do the same again the next day. That's the first test. The second test is remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Verse 22 and 23, on the sixth day, they gathered twice as much because the Lord commanded tomorrow is to be a day of Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So, day six is different because this time they're supposed to gather in twice as much so they can enjoy a day of rest. Now, remember, the people of Israel, they've never done this before. They've never seen this bread before, but they're not going into this test blind, by which I mean they have their past. God has rescued them. God has been leading them, pillar of cloud, pillar of fire. God has been providing for them water and food. God has been keeping His covenant promise that He made over 400 years ago. Just like them, our faith is never blind.

[11 : 32] Our faith is rooted in God is. Thus says the Lord, that we see the glory of God in Christ Jesus. So, there's these two tests related to gathering, but significantly also we discover that the God who asks them to obey graciously makes the obedience possible. Because the only way they can gather bread is if God rains it down from heaven, which He does for them, except on the Sabbaths, for forty years. Did you notice that in verse 35? They ate manna for forty years until they

reached the border of Canaan. The land would be good, a land of plenty. They don't need the bread from heaven then.

How else does God graciously provide? Well, He preserved the manna on the Sabbath. It lasted twice as long as it did ordinarily. God is also so gracious in responding to their failure. So, in verse 20, some of them showing a lack of trust. On day one, they're told, gather as much as you need, but they gather extra. They stockpile, and it stinks, and it's full of maggots. Or on day seven, when they're told to rest, and some of them go out to work, God is patient with them. Though they are children not yet fully trusting, though they are suffering from spiritual amnesia, God graciously instructs, leading them towards faith. Verse 29, this is God speaking, Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath. That is why on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days, so the people rested on the seventh day. He's leading them to know He is trustworthy, leading them towards faith, leading them to rest. And He graciously provides also by once again showing up in His glory. The people are grumbling, and God says, gather. And as they gather, verse 9 and 10, He shows the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. He doesn't abandon His people. He doesn't give up on His people. He's walking with them, inviting them to understand that they can trust and they can obey.

Now, I want to connect their testing with our own to think about the life of faith. To do that, a story from our summer holidays. We went to a park called Beda Park in the summer holidays, and my abiding memory of that park is of one boy, maybe 11, 12 years old at the top of it. You can see up the top there, an inflatable jump. Not particularly high jump, maybe 12 feet or so, but this poor boy spent, it felt like, hours stuck on the ledge. He would get so far, you'd see him sort of crouching, and then he would give up. He'd pull back. His parents would try and encourage him. His friends would try and encourage him. He would see person after person doing the jump, enjoying the jump, but he just couldn't. And there's a real battle going on, until eventually towards the end of the day, finally, felt like cheating. He took the leap, and you could see his face lit up with joy.

And then he was on that endless repeat, up the stairs, off the jump, off the stairs, off the jump. Now, is our faith, is Christian faith, a leap in the dark? Is it a scary, terrifying thing?

[15 : 25] Sometimes the criticism made of Christianity is that our faith is nothing more than that, just a leap in the dark. We have no basis for our trust. I would suggest that a better picture of our faith, not jumping into the nothingness. It's more like abseiling, where we've got an instructor, and we're secure by a rope and by a harness. At every point, we are held. Yes, there are still points that are fearful, but we're always held and always kept. Christian faith is reasonable. Just like Israel, we see God's creation. We had a beautiful day today. We have a great creator. The fine-tuning of the universe speaks to a creator. We have demonstrations of God's character in his word, in our experience. We have his covenant commitment to his church, we have his giving of his Son, the Lord Jesus, to be our Savior. Our faith is eminently reasonable.

And so, when we are tested, we're invited to then lean into the truths and the promises of God's word. When our faith feels weak, we talk to a brother or sister in Christ to be encouraged from their experience and from God's word. We learn to obey and to trust with the grace that God provides. Their testing speaks to us of daily bread and daily trust. It speaks to us of the wisdom of the Lord's prayer. Remember Jesus teaching us to pray, give us today our daily bread. Our temptation often is that we project forward, we imagine all that might happen, and we want a year's supply today. All the wisdom for all we might ever face. All the courage for all that might come our way. All the strength for what may happen. But rather, we're called to come daily. To trust daily in a Father who loves us, who is good, who does provide physically and spiritually, who does invite us to come every day. And so, we pray every day, and we pray through the day. As needs arise, as situations change, as testing come, daily bread calls us to daily trust. But the Sabbath day testing also reminds us of Sabbath rest and the gift of worship, doesn't it? It reminds us of the wisdom of God's design, that woven into the fabric of creation is that we are made to rest and to be refreshed. And to re-center our lives and our hearts on our Creator and our Redeemer. We're not made to run the endless treadmill. Rather, we're invited to stop. That's part of God's provision in our testing as we come together on a Sunday. We stop and we remember, I'm not God. I'm not invited to have all the answers and be in total control. I'm invited to trust the one who knows and who loves me. In the midst of everything that's happening, we're invited to stop and recognize our God deserves our worship, deserves our loyalty, deserves first place in our heart. We stop and we worship so that God can feed us, that we can receive His grace as we hear God's Word, as we're reminded of the

gospel, as we remember that

[19 : 45] God loves us and sent His Son to be the Savior for sinners like us. So, in our testing, we need God, we need His church, we need worship. Let's think finally about the object lesson. Let's think about this manna. Remember we said God's tests, they always have a purpose, the purpose being that His people might walk in faith and obedience. Now, it's interesting, isn't it, that at the end of our text, Moses is invited to gather some manna to provide an object lesson, not just for that generation, but future generations. Verse 32, this is what the Lord has commanded, take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt. So, one day supply is gathered and it's stored in a jar, and that jar would eventually be placed in the tabernacle when it was built. And remember, that manna that would usually last one day, two days at best, God is going to preserve it so it lasts beyond 40 years, as a lesson to remind them that God fed them. God provided for their needs all the way to the promised land. Every time they would then go to worship, future generations would go to worship, they would see the bread. Will I humbly trust and obey? To go to Deuteronomy 8, verse 3, will I be taught that man doesn't live by bread alone, but in every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. That there is something even more vital than this manna, and that's God's life-giving

Word. This story reminds us, and the Bible reminds us, and our experience teaches us that times of testing will come. The life will feel like we're wandering in the wilderness, and there'll be times where we feel like God has taken us on a hard road, and there may be times where we feel there could be no possible good in our circumstances. There are times when our faith will come under pressure. There'll be a refining from God as He wants to squeeze out sin and self and form us into the likeness of Jesus.

But there's also going to be the world wanting to squeeze us into its mold. We're going to be wanting comfort and security. So when hard times come, it can lead us to confusion and to doubt. When faith turns to fear, when we're tempted towards grumbling, how do we not give in? How will it be possible for us actually to grow in faith, to grow in obedience through the hardships that God sends our way?

From our text, we can say there are two things we need. First of all, we need the Word of God. We must gather the Word of God like the people gathered the manna. As we come to church each Sunday, come ready to hear life-giving words from God, to gather them. As we read the Bible for ourselves each day, it is the light for our path. It is our life. It is our weapon in the spiritual battle.

[23 : 30] As we gather God's Word, we must feed on it. We must take it in. We must take it in. Working hard to listen, taking time to meditate, praying for help to do what it says.

And we must receive it as a gift from God. This is God's inspired living Word. This Word that contains the gospel Word. A Word that speaks eternal life to us. Without this Word, we have spiritual famine, but by God's grace, we're invited to spiritual feasts. Because as we open God's Word, we hear God's promises, and we see again God's faithfulness, and we learn God's will for our life of faith, and we recognize that He sent us Jesus, and He sent us the Spirit, and there is grace for each day.

And of course, as we experience God's tests, we need God's greatest gift. We need Jesus, the living Word of God. John 6, Jesus describes Himself as the bread from heaven.

Jesus describes Himself as the bread of life. Jesus invites us to feed on Him by faith, and to enjoy eternal life. He calls us to look to Him as God's life-giving provision for us on the walk of faith. To understand that to have Jesus as Savior is to have everything. If we have Jesus, we have eternal life. If we have Jesus, we have eternal love.

If we have Jesus, our sins are forgiven. If we have Jesus, we have spiritual freedom. We have this great anticipation of future realities in our promised land still to come, but we begin to experience the life of God right here and right now.

[25 : 49] The answer to our grumbling, the answer to the struggle that we have in our testing, is gospel gratitude. It's to think on Jesus, that when we so often fail in the test of faith, we have a Savior who passed the test for us. When He was being tempted by the devil in the wilderness, turned these stones to bread. Man should not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes in the mouth of the Lord. Jesus lived with faith and obedience all through His life, including going to the cross to be our willing, loving Savior, facing the ultimate test for us. And Jesus, now ascended, sends the Spirit, so He's with us in every test that we face, supplying daily grace in our weakness,

every day, until we too reach our promised land. So when God in His wisdom tests our faith, He wants to grow our dependence on Him, that we will grow to trust and obey Him. And when those tests and those trials bring us into, again, a wilderness experience, what we need to do is to gather to ourselves the gospel of grace once again, to receive God's gracious provision for us in the Lord Jesus, the God of glory present with us. We can expect tests, but we don't need to be depressed by them or defeated by them as we understand that God is with us to help us and strengthen us. And He supplies what we need so that we endure by faith. Let's pray together. Lord, our God, we thank you.