

Exodus 15:22-18:27

Study Outline

Launching question

John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* has long been regarded as a classic picture of the Christian life*. Discuss together some ways in which it's helpful to think about the Christian life as a journey ...

The story so far ...

How does God save, thinking back to Study 5 and 6? (12:21-23 and 14:13)

Why does God save? (three reasons: 3:7-8 / 14:4, 17 / 14:17-18 cf 25)

God promised to take his people on a journey from Egypt to the land he'd promised them ... today's study is about what it's like on that journey.

The God who provides 'on the journey'

Select between two and five (depending on time) of the stories here.

Read through each story you select, and ask:

- what problem arises?
- how do the people react?
- what does Moses do?
- how does God respond? / how is God involved in the resolution?
- describe what God is like
- what should God's people learn from this?

(Maybe record your answers as a grid on a large sheet of paper?)

Some stories are described here as 'tests': what exactly is the test faced?

How is Israel testing the Lord (cf 17:2, 7)? Why?

How is the Lord testing Israel (cf 15:25; 16:4; Psalm 81:7 etc)? Why?

Thinking it through

What is God's involvement with Israel 'on the journey'?

The Bible treats the Exodus as a picture of our conversion, and the Promised Land as heaven: so, in this picture of the story of Israel, where are we now? List some of the ways God provides for us 'on the journey'.

When we face challenges in our Christians lives, are they all God testing us? Applying Israel's poor example, how should we respond to trials?

Summarise these five stories: what have we learnt about how God deals with his people / us, on the journey to the destination promised to us.

What do you think we should be praying for one another as fellow pilgrims?

* If you are unfamiliar with *The Pilgrim's Progress*, you can get information online. Try http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pilgrim%E2%80%99s_Progress

Exodus 15:22-18:27

Study 7

T H E G O D W H O P R O V I D E S

Summary

Exodus is the story of God showing us what he is like: he is the God who rescues his people. He does this in faithfulness to his promises, for his own glory, and out of sheer mercy and kindness to those he has chosen. We should expect to know our God better through reading this book.

The story so far

God has done what he said: responding to his people's cries for help (2:23), and in faithfulness to his promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), he has 'brought his people out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery' (20:2). We have seen how God achieves this salvation:

- (a) by acts of judgment, defeating all his enemies;
- (b) by the shedding of a substitute's blood.

We have also seen why God achieves this salvation:

- (a) for the sake of his people (3:7-8);
- (b) for his own sake, to get glory for himself (14:4, 17 cf 9:16);
- (c) to reveal himself: soon all Egypt (7:5), all Israel (6:6-7), all the world (9:16) and for all ages (3:15) will know him as the God who saves. 18:8-11 is an example of this happening: Jethro hears, and comes to 'know'.

The question that remains is this: what will the Lord now do about his redeemed people? God made it clear (3:8) that he was acting to fulfil his promise to Abraham to give his descendants a 'land' (Gen 12:1-3, 7): will he deliver on that promise, and get them to that destination?

Theme Sentence

When God saves people, he provides for them all that they need.

Ideas for application

- God is continuing to reveal himself, and in particular here as the one who carries his people on eagle's wings (19:4). The Lord's ongoing provision for the people he has saved should be a tremendous encouragement to us: we should 'forget not all his benefits' (Ps 103:2).
- each of these 5 challenges is in some ways a 'test' provided by God for the sake of his people. Our response shouldn't be to play the game of 'test-spotting' (ie which of the situations I face are 'tests' from the Lord for me), but trusting him that he is providing all I need (rather than grumbling) and obeying him (rather than hardening my heart).
- who is coming to know of the Lord through my story-telling (18:8-11)?

Commentary

A catalogue of five stories to show **God's care** for his people: he provides drink twice (15:22-27; 17:1-7), food (16:1-36), and deliverance from threats both external (17:8-16) and internal (18:1-27). God is carrying Israel 'as a man carries his son' (Deut 1:31), or 'on eagle's wings' (Ex 19:4).

15:22-27 Remember God's care in the choice of this route (14:17-18), and the people's confidence in their shepherd (15:13-18). So though they face this hurdle so soon after the high point of 15:1-18, God is caring for his people even here, 'testing' them (25) by asking them 'do you trust this rescuing God enough to do what he says?'

A principle is established for them from the example of the Egyptians. Only those who listen to the Lord's voice (which Pharaoh had refused to do cf 5:2; 7:3-4) will be saved by 'the Lord who heals' from his 'acts of judgment'. God's healing means not just abundant supply, but 'perfection' (in 27, that's what the numbers '12' and '70' represent). This same healing from all the marks of God's judgment comes to us from the cross (Isa 53:5).

16:1-36 God provides meat and manna (11-12) in response to Israel's grumbling over lack of food (2-3) / grumbling against the Lord (8). Again, he does this to test them (4), and some do try to find ways round God's instructions (eg 20, 27). What they had to learn was to rely every day on the fact that God hadn't forgotten them; and for forty years, he would always prove trustworthy (35).

For this chapter (and the rest of the Bible), the emphasis is placed on the bread. The manna in the jar (33) was kept in the Ark of the Covenant (Heb 9:4), at the heart of Israel's worship. Of course. This 'bread' is central to remembering who God is, the one who 'brought you out of the land of Egypt' (32). Providing manna is proof of the Exodus and of the character of the rescuing God.

John 6 applies this. Jesus explains that he is the true 'bread from heaven' (6:30-35). A person eats this 'bread' by believing in him (6:36), and anyone who believes in him (unlike Israel who ate the manna and yet still died) will live forever (6:49-50). So, the same connection is being made by Jesus: 'bread from heaven' and 'being saved' go together. As in Exodus (cf Ps 78:17-29), when God saves, generously there's no more hunger, no more thirst (6:35).

17:1-7 Two places in the Bible provide a commentary on this story, warning a later generation of Jews (Ps 95:7b-11) and then Christians (Heb 3:7-4:11) not to do what our ancestors did here. They stopped 'making every effort to enter that rest' (Heb 4:11), and so God 'swore in his anger they shall never enter it'.

Where did they go wrong? 'Test' (2, 7) means 'bring a lawsuit'

(lit): Israel put God on trial. They'd seen what God had done (cf Ex 14:13-14) and heard what God had said (eg Ex 6:6-8), yet incredibly they were still asking 'is the Lord among us or not?' (7).

But Psalm 81:7 explains that again this is a third story about God testing them: the people have no water ... what will they do? Deut 8:2-5 shows why God tested them like this: after manna for their hunger, would they now trust him for water for their thirst? No, tragically, they hardened their hearts (Psalm 95:8).

Of course, this is so frightening because it is exactly what Pharaoh did (eg 8:15 etc). We're now being told that God's people were no better. They too were all (except two) to be left out of the Promised Land (Num 14:20-35; Deut 1:26-36), not entering 'rest'.

This story shows God being even kinder than it first appears: for a second time (cf 15:22-27) he provides drink, and he does it for people who test him, question him and harden their hearts.

17:8-16 Deut 25:17-19 specifically links this defeat of Amalek with the Lord giving 'rest', and 'rest' is shorthand for all that God promises Israel in the Land (cf Psalm 95:7-11). So if God failed here, at this first post-Egypt opposition, he would be dishonoured (Num 14:16-17).

The battle is won or lost depending on whether Moses held up 'the staff of God' (9) or his hand (11 note not 'hands') that held it (9). This rod represents God's might (cf 14:16, 21 and 17:5), so the point is that what wins victory is neither Joshua's military might nor Moses' intercessory prayers (which is how this story tends to be popularly interpreted) but him: the battle is the Lord's.

The name of the altar, 'the Lord is my banner', gets picked up in Isaiah 11:10f. Here it is Jesus himself (= 'the Root of Jess') who'll 'stand as a banner for all peoples': nations will come to him (for the perfection of 11:6-9). This supports the idea that 'the banner' for God's people is a person, the Lord himself (as 15 says).

The 'book' (14) is maybe the 'Book of the Wars of the Lord' (cf Numbers 21:14). But the important thing here is the contrast between remembering and forgetting: Israel is to remember that the Lord will forget! Why is God so harsh with Amalek? (a) because 'rest' can only be experienced if enemies are destroyed; (b) because Amalek was grandson of Esau (Gen 36:12, 16) and since 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated' (Rom 9:13), it is a matter of God's glory that his mercy is seen in saving some; (c) because Amalek has 'lifted his hand against the throne of the Lord' (= NIV footnote of 16), and that arrogant rebellion must be punished.

18:1-27 Israel faces an internal threat: Moses' workload (17-18). Deliverer and prophet, he's a key person in this rescue mission. Jethro's wise solution is division of labour (17-23). But behind it all, the hero is God, for his laws are the basis for any decision-making (15-16).