

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE DESERT

Exodus 15:22 – 18:27

I. Full Salvation?

A. Chapter 15 is not the end of the story.

We might expect that the story of the exodus would end with chapter 15 and the crossing of the Red Sea. Look what has already happened:

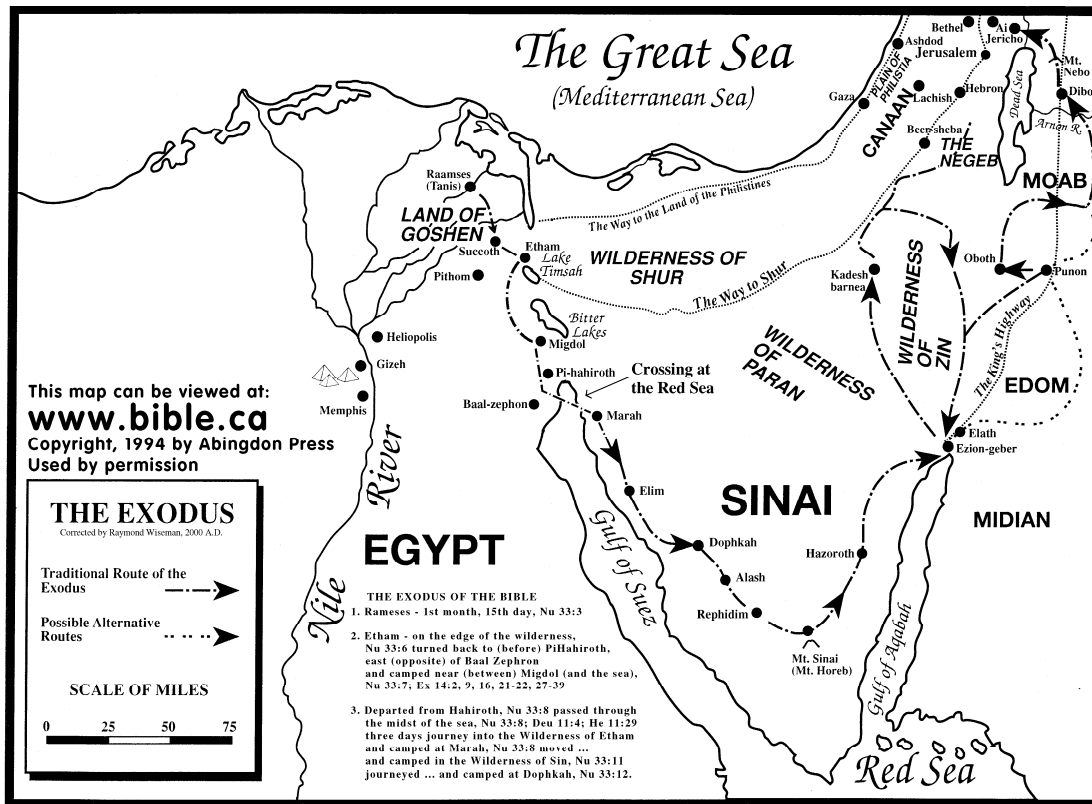
- God has **revealed Himself** and His power.
- The people have put their **faith / trust** in God.
- The **chains of bondage** have been broken.
- A **form of worship** has been established (Passover).
- **Redemption** (through blood and water) has occurred!

Amen! Let's find our tambourine and join Miriam on the eastern shore of the Red Sea and praise God for the salvation He has accomplished. What could possibly be added to a salvation so complete and so definitive? But look again. The book of Exodus has 40 chapters, not 15. As wonderful and "complete" as redemption may be, at this point, the people have only just begun. Though their salvation is real, it is also partial. God's purposes for His people are much bigger than getting them out of bondage. Looking ahead, we discover that He also intends:

- To enter into a covenant (marriage) with them at Sinai. He wants a **relationship** with them that is personal, intimate, and exclusive.
- To guide their lives so that they always know **His will**. The pillar of fire and the law at Sinai are means through which His guidance was always available.
- To cure them of **double-mindedness** (longing to go back to Egypt). God wants to take them out of Egypt so He can take Egypt out of them!
- To teach them how He can supply **all their needs**... even in the desert. Food, water, protection. If they have God... they have all they need.
- To live among them in **power and glory**. The climax of redemption comes at the end of the book: "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:34).
- To take them to Canaan, a land of milk and honey, so they can possess their **inheritance**. Although they have been redeemed, they are not yet home!



B. The Geography of Salvation.



The map tells us a great deal about the salvation God has in mind for His people.

- Getting out of Egypt does not immediately get us into Canaan.
- The desert was not a “mistake.” God led His people there for a reason.
- The desert was never intended to be a permanent home.
- Most of those first-generation believers did not make it to their final inheritance. They had enough faith to get out of Egypt but not enough faith to get into Canaan.

TABLE TALK

1. Look again at the blanks that you filled in on page 1. Would it be safe to say that most Christians today have defined their salvation as if the Gospel story ended at Exodus 15?
2. How do you understand “full salvation”?
3. Look again at the map. Where are you in terms of the geography of salvation? Still in Egypt? In the desert? In Canaan?
4. What is God saying to you about your spiritual journey?



II. This Is a Test!

A. Why do teachers in school test their students?

- _____.
- _____.
- _____.
- _____.
- _____.

B. The desert is a great place to test people... to prove what they are made of!
Notice some of the characteristics of a desert:

- Lack of water.
- Lack of food.
- Lack of shelter, protection... from the extremes of weather and from enemy attacks.
- Boredom.

C. Like a good professor, God also tests His people.

- *There (at Marah, bitter springs) **He tested them.** (Ex. 15:25).*
- *I will rain down bread from heaven.... In this way **I will test them** and see whether they will follow my instructions. (Ex. 16:4).*
- *Do not be afraid. God has come **to test you**, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning. (Ex. 20:20).*
- *Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and **to test you** in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. (Deut. 8:2).*
- *He gave you manna to eat in the desert... to humble and **to test you** so that in the end it might go well with you. (Deut. 8:16).*

Other Scriptures also talk about God's intention to test His people.

- ***God tested Abraham**.... "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love.... Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering...." (Gen. 22:1-2).*
- *If a prophet says... "Let us follow other gods"... you must not listen to that prophet.... **The Lord is testing you** to find out whether you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut. 13:1-3).*



- *I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them **to test Israel** and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord... (Judges 2:21-22).*
- *These are the nations the Lord left **to test** all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan (He did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience)... (Judges 3:1-2).*
- *But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon... God left Hezekiah **to test him** and to know everything that was in his heart. (II Chron. 32:31).*

D. Seven reasons God tests His children.

In looking over the previous verses we can determine at least seven reasons why God would take someone to Desert U for testing.

- To find out whether we will **obey Him** or not (Ex. 16:4; Judges 2:21-22).
- To teach us to **fear God** so that we will be kept from sinning (Ex. 20:20).
- To reveal whether we really **love Him** or not (Deut. 13:1-3).
- To **humble us** (Deut. 8:2, 16).
- So that **in the end** it will go well for us (Deut. 8:16).
- To teach us **spiritual warfare** (Judges 3:1-2).
- To **expose** what is really in our hearts (Deut. 8:2; II Chron. 32:31).

TABLE TALK

- Describe a time when God has tested you?
- What did you learn in the test? Did you pass or fail?
- How does this study change your view of God?
- How does this study change your view of your "desert experience"?
- If you are in a test now... look again at the seven reasons God tests His children mentioned above. Which reason best describes your present situation?



III. University of the Desert.

When we look closely at how God led His redeemed people from the Red Sea toward Canaan, we can begin to discern the outlines of a basic curriculum in His education for living a life that matters.

A. General Information about your educational experience at U of D.

- 1) God is the teacher... not Moses!
- 2) The courses are not electives... they are required.
- 3) Completion of your "degree" may take longer than expected... but the successful completion of the program is attainable for all.
- 4) For those who have graduated, refresher courses are offered and continuing education is highly recommended.
- 5) Although this university is in a desert setting, do not expect that all your campus experiences will be austere and severe. God intends there to be great joy during our stay at U of D.

B. The Core Curriculum. See Exodus 15:22 – 18:27.

There are five courses in the core curriculum at Desert U.

1) Exodus 15:22-27.

Just three days beyond the greatest miracle of redemption in the history of the world (the Red Sea), the people cannot find water. The pillar of fire is leading them... but divine guidance has led them (!) to a place of bitter springs. The people grumble. Moses prays. God uses a "piece of wood" to transform a bitter experience into a sweet one.

- Name of the course:
Cross-Purposes 101.
- Life situation:
If you find yourself doing your best to follow God and obey His commands and you keep finding yourself at a "bitter place," then this course is for you.
- The big question this course aims to answer:
Will bitter experiences rob me of my inheritance?
- Course description:
 - 1) The course intends to cure the student of grumbling about bitter things that happen.



- 2) The goal is to teach how the **cross of Jesus** (another "piece of wood") is able to take any bitter experience and transform it into something good.
- 3) The ultimate goal of this course is to provide **immunity** from all the "Egyptian diseases" (15:26) that had previously infected them.
- 4) Memory work Hebrews 12:14-15.
Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy, without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

- Requirements:

- 1) Students will be required to stop **pretending** the water they are drinking isn't really bitter.
- 2) They will be asked to confess how they struggle with the concept that **divine guidance** often leads to bitter experiences.
- 3) They will be taught how to use the cross of Christ as a means of making what is bitter to become sweet.

- 2) Exodus 16:1-36.

There was no food in the desert and the people grumbled again. Worse, they began to be homesick for Egypt where we "sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted" (16:3). God hears their complaints and knows that their grumbling is against Him... not Moses. God answered their grumbling by sending them **manna/the bread of heaven**.... free every day for 40 years!

- Name of the course:

Nutrition 101.

- Life situation:

When you find an inner emptiness that redemption doesn't seem to fill... when you begin to wonder if maybe life wasn't better back in Egypt living in the bondage of sin and maybe Egypt would be a better destination than Canaan!....then this course is for you!

- The big question this course aims to answer:

Can God **provide** for me and sustain me? Can the bread of heaven satisfy the gnawing emptiness inside?



- Course description:
The great purpose of this course is **to expose** and begin **to cure** that double-mindedness that causes so many to get stuck somewhere "between Egypt and Canaan." The course emphasizes that God's great purpose in redemption is not just taking the student out of Egypt... but more importantly, taking "Egypt" out of the student.

The student will be expected to do much of the work at home. Each morning, he will be asked to trust God that when he opens his tent flap there will be a sufficient supply of manna lying on the ground to get him and his family **through the day**.

- Requirements:
 - Students will learn how to **gather their own** portion of daily bread. They will learn that no one else can do this for them.
 - **Sabbath rest** and worship is necessary. The 7th day belongs to God. No labor is permitted as a sign of faith.
 - Memory work. Deuteronomy 8:2
He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

3) Exodus 17:1-7.

Moving on through the desert toward Sinai the people again experience thirst. No water! This time they not only grumbled, they quarreled with Moses and "**put the Lord to the test**" by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (17:2, 7). God responded by telling Moses to take the rod and strike the rock of Horeb. And water came and met their need.

- Name of the course:
Heart Purity 101.
- Life situation:
Out of water... again! One test was OK, even two. But now, there is another one? You begin to think that God (the teacher) doesn't know what He is doing. You wonder if you couldn't do it better. Rather than taking the attitude of a student and letting Him test you... you want to usurp the teacher's role and presume to **test Him!** Welcome to a class specifically designed for your needs!



- The big question this course aims to answer:
Who's **in charge**? Can I trust that God knows best? Will the student test the teacher?
- Course description:
This course aims to once and for all expose and destroy that rebel-spirit that resides in the heart of every pilgrim. The grumbling, the quarreling, and especially the "testing" of God must stop if Canaan is ever going to be reached. This course aims to expose the student to his own duplicitous nature and cure him forever by giving him an **undivided** heart.
- Requirements:
 - Learning to trust God even when your human leaders seem incompetent.
 - Memorize Psalm 86:11.
*Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth;
Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.*

4) Exodus 17:8-16.

OK. Things are looking pretty good. We have food and water. And people seem relatively content, until.... "Attack!" The Amalakites, a band of violent raiders, want to wipe you off the face of the earth. What to do? Do we fight? Do we pray? Is this God's battle? Or ours? God provides an amazing answer in calling Moses to **pray**... and Joshua to **fight**. It takes them both to win the battle.

- Name of the course:
Prayer 101.
- Life situation:
Wham! Bam! You take three steps forward with God, and it feels like all hell is breaking loose. Members of your family are upset... your boss is threatening... migraine headaches are almost daily occurrences... When you feel like Satan and his minions are swarming around you like angry hornets, threatening to take you out, then you are a prime candidate for Prayer 101.
- The big question this course aims to answer:
Can God **protect** me? Does prayer work?



- Course description:
The emphasis of the course is on helping the student to develop skills of **discernment** so that he knows when it is time to fight and when it is time to pray.
- Course requirements:
 - 1) Field work in **spiritual warfare** will be demanded of every student. No fighting will occur without prayer. And no praying will be allowed that is an evasion from the battle.
 - 2) Memory work: Ephesians 6:16-18.
In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.
 - 5) Exodus 18:1-27.
A problem of a totally different nature now emerges. Burn out! The administrative load is just too great and Moses is about to crack under the weight. And the needs of the people are not being met. "The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone." (18:18). God is as interested in solving the administrative overload problem as he was in providing water, or bread. He knows that this problem threatens the success of the mission as surely as do the Amalekites! The solution is to find qualified, godly men to whom the administrative load can be delegated. In this way Moses **is spared**... and the people's needs **are met**.

- Name of the course:
Organization 101.
- Life situation:
If you find that you cannot focus on the important things in life because you can't escape the **tyranny of the urgent** ... If you find your priorities are out of alignment and you are failing those you love the most... if you sometimes feel like a ping pong ball bouncing from one crisis to another... then this course is for you.



- The big question this course aims to answer:
Can God help me to **organize** my life?
- Course description:
This course may use adjunct professors that surprise you. Jethro, the priest of Midian (a gentile!) was the man God used to teach Moses what he needed to know about management and administration. Likewise, contemporary students may find a wealth of "godly" counsel in secular writings on organizational skills.
- Course requirements:
 - 1) This course will begin by making sure that the student's own personal world is in order: thought life, self-control, spiritual disciplines, money management, time management, family leadership, etc. No one who fails to **manage himself** should ever be trusted with managing others.
 - 2) Memory Work: Ephesians 4:11-12
It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

TABLE TALK

1. Look again at the core curriculum for Desert U.
 - Cross-Purposes 101
 - Nutrition 101
 - Heart Purity 101
 - Prayer 101
 - Organization 101

Does God have you enrolled in one of these courses right now? Which one?
2. How long have you been in this course? When do you expect to "graduate"?
3. Has this study of the University of the Desert been an encouragement to you or a discouragement? Why?

