

**GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES
THOUGH PEOPLE DOUBT HIM
Exodus 15:22-16:36**

Please review this week's catechism question.

Did you meet anyone new after church this past Sunday?

INTRODUCTION

In what kinds of circumstance are you most likely to complain and/or blame others? Does it seem to you that most of your complaints are valid? Why or why not?

We daily complain about the disappointments of our lives, how our plans didn't go as we wanted or someone let us down or the weather didn't cooperate. We regularly fluctuate between anger and sadness and worry and fear as we are faced with the disappointments and uncertainties of our lives. This is the situation in which we find the entire nation of Israel in this passage in Exodus. They've just left a worship service where they have praised God for delivering them from the Egyptian army and confessed their faith that the Lord is leading them. Yet, they are full of anger and of fear due to their circumstances and they are complaining and demanding that somebody fix it, now. They don't see God at all, in spite of the fact that there is a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire with them each day. Nevertheless, God, contrary to what they think, is very involved in what is going on. He has a very definite work that he is doing, but they don't see that. His goal for Israel is to convince them that he alone is their savior; that he is all they need. He is out to persuade this nation of fretting people that he is in charge and they can trust him. He is out to convince them that he is the God who heals them. He is the God who alone is their savior. He is glorious and can be trusted.

STUDY

1. What are some ways the beginning of the two stories (finding bitter water, 15:22-24 and no food, 16:1-3) are similar? How are the two beginnings different?

In both situations the people of Israel are in need of a basic necessity, food and water. These are real problems with very real, negative consequences if they are not solved. In both situations they cannot see how the basic necessity is going to be provided. The water is bitter and the food supplies are getting low. In both situations they "grumble" against Moses and make a demand upon him. They are different in that the first story takes place after they are in the desert 3 days after crossing the Red Sea or maybe 10 days after leaving Egypt. The second story occurs 30 days after leaving Egypt and therefore about 20 days after the water problem at Marah. The demand is stated differently. They simply ask, "What are we going to drink?" in the first story, whereas they express a longing for Egypt and an accusation that Moses plans to kill them in the second one. The second "grumbling" seems more desperate and rebellious than the first. The description of life in Egypt is obviously overly positive. The accusation that Moses intends to kill them by starvation is obviously contrary to everything that has happened up to this point.

2. Who put them in these circumstances?

God is the one who put them in these conditions. We know from back in 13:20-22 that the Lord is the one who is guiding them through the desert. He leads them by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He knew they were running out of water and out of food. He knew that the water at Marah was bitter. In 16:7 & 8 Moses tells them they are grumbling against God when they complain like this which implies that God has put them in these conditions.

3. According to 15:25, 16:4 and Deut. 8:2-3 why did God put them in these "needy" conditions?

God put them in these conditions to test them, to find out what was in their hearts, to see whether or not they would trust and obey him. God led them to bitter water to reveal to them their bitter hearts. He caused them to run out of food to show them they loved bread more

than him. God made them hungry and then fed them in order to test them, to see what was in their hearts. It's a scary thing to not have water and to not have food. It is especially frightening when you have children to take care of. However, God is the one who puts them in this situation first of all to show them what is in their hearts. He took them from their worship service at the Red Sea, three days into the desert in order that they might know that in spite of their singing, they still didn't trust God. Their biggest problems weren't lack of water and food. Their biggest problem was they didn't trust God. They believed being a slave in Egypt was better than belonging to God in the desert. It was the lack of water and food that revealed what was really going on in their hearts.

4. What does it mean when we complain about difficult circumstances and accuse others of creating them and demand that they be fixed?

Our mouths are simply revealing that we have hearts that do not trust God. We show that we believe someone or something other than God is most necessary to be happy and secure.

God aims to convince us that he alone is what we need by revealing our hearts.

5. What is Moses first response to the complaining of Israel in 15:25? In what way does this picture Jesus' present ministry (See Rom. 8:34 & Hebrews 7:25) and God's response to his ministry?

Israel sins by grumbling and Moses immediately asks God for help. This is a perfect picture of the work of Jesus Christ on behalf of everyone who trusts in him. We sin and he intercedes on our behalf, asking God not to punish us for our sins but to treat us as if we had never sinned but always obeyed.

6. Why does God provide Israel with drinkable water?

God does not provide Israel with water because they are such faith filled people. He makes the water sweet because he has chosen them and Moses prays on their behalf. At this point, neither God nor Moses mentions Israel's unbelief. The grumbling they do is clearly unbelief.

However, God does not at this point reprimand Israel for their grumbling. This is what is shocking about this little story. God doesn't mention their sin. He graciously meets their need, without requiring anything from them.

7. According to 16:6-8 and 11-12, why is God going to provide Israel with meat and bread?

So they will know that the Lord is the one who brought them out of Egypt (not Moses and Aaron as they said in v. 3). So they will see his glory. So they will know that he is Yahweh. In addition, he says twice he is doing this because he heard their grumbling. It would seem that God is going to provide for them in spite of their sinfulness, thereby showing his grace. His objective in their provision is to supply their need in such a way that his glorious grace is made manifest in the most remarkable way: both in the miraculous nature of the provision and in highlighting their unworthiness of the gift. God's ultimate purpose in providing isn't their need but his delight in being kind to sinners.

8. Why does God give you life, food, clothing, shelter, a job, friends, and eternal life through Jesus Christ?

He doesn't give us food and clothing and shelter and air to breath and eternal life through Christ because of anything we have ever done.
What is shocking about our lives is not that we get sick or have accidents happen to us or have people treat us bad. What is shocking is that each day we wake up and breath and have food to eat and get to enjoy a day like today. He delights to be gracious to sinners and so reveal his glory. That is why he is kind to us, not because we have earned or deserve his kindness. He isn't kind to us because we are so valuable but because it makes him happy to be kind and gracious to mean and rebellious people.

9. After Moses and Aaron tell Israel what God is going to do in vv. 6-8 God manifests his glory in the pillar of cloud (v. 10). Then the Lord tells Moses again what he is going to do and Moses (presumably) repeats the same information again. Why does God do this?

Up to this point they have seen men, Moses and Aaron, telling them what God thinks. But now, he confirms the word of men by a more visible manifestation of his presence. God, with his glory blazing in the cloud, tells Moses again what Moses just told the people so he can repeat it again to the people. God adds his manifest presence to confirm the truth of his word. God doesn't always do this, but he sometimes does it. He sometimes, by the work of his Holy Spirit, manifests his presence in more visible, experiential ways. Sometimes he heals people. Sometimes, by his Spirit he brings a more vigorous sense of spiritual reality to our hearts. He does it to confirm his word to us, not to give us new revelation.

10. In John 6, Jesus shows how the provision of manna points to him and his work. He is “the bread that comes down from heaven to give life to the world.” What are some ways that God’s provision of manna to Israel helps us to understand the work of Christ and our relationship to him?

God gave life to Israel in the desert by giving them bread from heaven. He gave them this bread in spite of their sinfulness. They didn't deserve it, nor did they earn it. He gave it to them contrary to what they deserved. They had no other hope, no other way to live other than by God's provision. They had to eat what God provided or die. This physical symbol pointed to the much greater reality that only God can give that which will sustain eternal life. If a human being is going to live forever, then it must be by means of God's provision. God has made a gracious provision for our lives by giving Jesus Christ as the bread of heaven. If we will come to him and trust in him, then he will be our life, our eternal life. He is given to us, even though we are a complaining and bitter people. We must simply believe that to have Christ is better than having the world. All of God's free gifts: food, air, clothing, homes, sunny days, rain, life point to the ultimate free gift that he offers to each of us, eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God aims to convince us that he alone is what we need by revealing his glorious grace.

11. According to 15:26, 16:4, 16, 19, 23, 26, 28-29, what is to be the result of God’s graciously providing water and food to Israel?

They are to obey his commands. The effect of grace is that Israel is to trust God by obeying his commands. In particular they are to gather an omer per person for six days, keep none of it until morning, gather twice as much on the sixth day (Friday) and keep the extra portion until Saturday to eat, and then do no work on Saturday but stay where they are and rest. God's command is that they gather the food he provides each day and then take a day off each week.

12. How did Israel do at following his instructions?

Verse 20 gives us the answer. Some of them paid no attention to the word of the Lord and kept some of the manna until the next day. When they did it turned rotten, maggots got into it and it stank. In v. 25 Moses tells the Israelites that they will not find any manna on the ground on the seventh day. Here is another word from the Lord. What do they do? Some of them go out on the Sabbath anyway to gather manna and, just as the Lord said, there was none to be found. Again, they do not obey the Lord, or pay attention to his commands. Again, the Lord expresses his displeasure by asking, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?” Once they see for themselves that there is no manna to be collected, then they keep God's Sabbath and don't go out to collect manna.

13. What’s the point in recording this disobedience and all these instructions regarding the Sabbath?

God is not saving these people because of their goodness. He sends the daily manna out of his mercy. He sends twice as much on Friday out of his mercy. He gives them the Sabbath to remind them that it is his work that matters, not their work, out of his grace. He sends twice as much manna on Friday and he preserves it from rotting on the seventh day. God expects Israel to trust him and do as he says. Obedience is always the result of faith. Those who trust that God is going to do what he promises and that what he promises is the best thing for them, do what God asks them to do. The Sabbath is instituted for just this purpose, to remind Israel that they are God's people. He

is going to take care of them. Their work is not what matters but God's work is what matters. God is the one who provides for them. They don't make the manna fall each day and they don't provide twice as much on Friday. They are to live by faith in his promises and rest from their work. This points forward to our Lord Christ who is the Lord who gives Sabbath rest to his people who rest from all their efforts to try and earn God's favor or to provide life for themselves (Matthew 11:28-12:14 & Hebrews 3:16-4:11). God provides us life through Christ, the bread of heaven. We are to trust in him and rest from our efforts to gain eternal life by our own work.

14. In what acts of obedience is the Lord asking you to exhibit your faith and rest in Christ?

God aims to convince us that he alone is what we need by requiring that we stop working and start trusting.

15. Summarize what the Lord wants Israel to do in vv. 31-36.

The Lord wants to have an omer of manna put in a jar and kept next to the Ark of the Covenant (Testimony) before the Lord, for the generations to come.

16. What is the significance of the Testimony (Ark of the Covenant)? Why does the Lord want the manna next to it? What is the point of this eternal reminder?

The Ark of the Covenant contains the 10 commandments. It is in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle which is the place where the Lord said he would dwell among the Israelites. No one can enter that place but the high priest and then only once per year on the Day of Atonement. The 10 Commandments in the presence of the Lord condemn all who enter his presence. However, the manna reminds the people that God provides for his people in spite of their sinfulness. The nation Israel for forty years wandered in the desert due to their sin, their law breaking. Yet the Lord fed them with the bread of heaven for all those years. They deserve death because they broke his law, yet God gave them life. We know that Jesus is the bread of heaven. He is the manna. Therefore the physical manna next to the

Testimony is a picture of the Lord Christ, living in the presence of God, as the life giving bread that God gives to lawbreakers. In Hebrews we are told that the earthly tabernacle was a physical representation of heaven. In heaven is the absolute holy law of God, which stands as evidence of our unworthiness. Yet at the same time, Christ, who is the bread from heaven, is also present there promising God's life to all who will eat. The manna, which represents Christ, is in the presence of the holy God whose laws we have broken. How can any of us dare to approach God, who blazes in his holy righteousness? We know that we have no hope of surviving such an encounter. We cannot stand in the presence of this holy God because we are lawbreakers. We have transgressed. However, in spite of our breaking of God's laws we know that Christ has been given as the bread of heaven to sustain us. If we come to him and eat, we have eternal life. He is the life giving bread that overcomes the poison of sin that is in us. Just as God sustained the physical life of lawbreaking Israel for 40 years through the giving of manna, so he sustains our eternal life through the life giving bread, which is Jesus Christ. Jesus always lives to be the bread of life for us.

17. How does it make you feel that Jesus, the bread from heaven, is eternally in the presence of God, next to the commands of God which you have broken?

God aims to convince us that he alone is what we need by reminding us of his eternal provision.