

Forever Faithful  
Exodus 15:22 – 17:16  
Series: Book of Exodus [#11]  
Pastor Lyle L. Wahl  
July 5, 2009

Theme: **God Is Forever Faithful For His Glory And Our Good.**

## Introduction

Try to see yourself as one of the approximately two million Israelites living about 3,500 years ago. 430 years earlier your ancestors came to Egypt as a haven from a severe drought and were given privileged status there because Joseph, one of your people, was Prime Minister. But, for over 80 years now your people have been slaves, crying out to God for deliverance. One day one of your own showed up telling you that God sent him to lead you out of Egypt to freedom in your own land. God performed some miraculous signs through him to confirm the message. You believed! You were ecstatic! *“We are going to be free!”*

Then this man Moses went to the Pharaoh with God’s message, “Let My people go!” But Pharaoh dismissed it and instead intensified his oppression on you. Now you saw this Moses not as a savior, but as a trouble maker. Moses returned to Pharaoh, repeating God’s message and performing a miraculous sign, but Pharaoh did not budge. Then a very strange and powerful series of miraculous events unfolded. God brought ten devastating plagues across Egypt. Thankfully, God miraculously isolated you and your people from all but the first three. Finally, after the last plague of God striking dead all the first born of the Egyptians, Pharaoh let you go. *Free! Free at last!*

Next God appeared in a pillar of cloud and fire and led you by it. The cloud rested and you camped by the Red Sea. Soon you saw dust clouds on the western horizon, and then your worst fears were realized—it was the Egyptian army. You were trapped between that unbeatable army and the uncrossable sea. Now you saw Moses not as a savior but a murderer, because you thought you would be killed. But God intervened. He used the pillar of cloud and fire to shield you from the Egyptians. He brought a strong wind that parted the waters of the Red Sea and cleared a wide dry path. When you made it through, the Egyptian chariots entered on the path. But God caused them all sorts of problems and then closed the water over them, drowning them all.

Moses and his sister Miriam led you in a great praise song of deliverance. Yes, *Praise the Lord! God is good! God is faithful! He dramatically did what He said He would do! You will always remember this! You will thank and praise God for the rest of your days! You will always trust Him!*

Well, not quite. In fact, just a few short days later you were complaining and grumbling about Moses and God. You did not see God as being faithful. You were not trusting him. You doubted that God was really with you (cf. 17:7).

As we come back to ourselves and today, it is easy to shake our heads and wonder at the Israelites of 3,500 years ago. After all of those mighty, visible demonstrations of God's presence and power, how could they rebel so quickly? They were not unique. What we see in that generation we see in every generation, including ours, and in ourselves.

As we look at the end of chapter 15 on through chapter 17 today we see two underlying threads of truth: Israel's unfaithfulness to God and God's constant faithfulness to them. It is this later truth that is our theme. *God is forever faithful for His glory and our good.*

### **Faithful When We Are Not.**

God is faithful when we are not. He was faithful to Israel when they grumbled and quarreled with Him, even though they did it repeatedly. The first incident, in chapter 15, was about undrinkable water. Israel had traveled for three days from the Red Sea without coming to any water. They would have filled up their skin bags with water before setting out. But they would not have enough water for an extended period of time. When they finally came upon water it was undrinkable. We find them complaining instead of praying.

In spite of their lack of faith and grumbling, God was faithful. He showed Moses a tree and told him to throw it into the water. The water then became drinkable. This was a supernatural event. The tree was only a visual, pointing to God and what He was doing. God was faithful. In His time, His way and for His glory He provided the water they needed. And even more than that, He led them on to the lush Elim oasis where they camped for a while. All of this in spite of their unfaithfulness.

The second incident took place a few weeks later as they set out from Elim. Having been on the road for a month, their food supply was running out and there wasn't much food to be had in the desert. It is recorded in chapter 16. Verse 2 tells us the "whole congregation," grumbled against Moses and Aaron. They were saying, "It would have been better if we had died from the plagues or work back in Egypt! At least there we had plenty of food! We're starving in this forsaken place! It's all your fault! You are killing us!"

The rest of the chapter details God's faithfulness for the short and long term. First, the short term. At evening a vast number of quail came to the camp and the people had more than enough meat to eat. Quail migrated along that route and often would settle on the ground to rest at night, being exhausted. So, they were easy to catch. But this was not a natural phenomenon. It occurred just when God said it would, and in vast numbers sufficient to feed and fill all the two million people. As well, Psalm 78 tells us, "[God] ... rained meat upon them like the dust ... He let them fall in the midst of their camp, round about their dwellings." (27, 28)

Now the long term. God miraculously provided food for them every day for the next forty years. If you grew up with Sunday School this miraculous work may be as *old hat* to you as it was to many of the Israelites after a short time. Every morning, except on the seventh day of the week, a fine flake-like thing would be on the ground (16:14). It was white or light gray in color and delicious, tasting like wafers and honey (16:31). When they first saw it,

not recognizing it, they naturally asked “What is it?” This food got its name *manna* from that question. Moses called it “the bread which the LORD has given you to eat” (16:15).

They had to get up early and gather it because it would melt under the hot sun (16:21), and yet they could bake and boil it (16:23). In faith they were to gather enough only for the day and eat it all that day, except on the sixth day when they were to collect enough for that day and the next, the Sabbath, when no manna would appear. Some disobeyed in the first days trying to store it, but it “bred worms and became foul” on the second day (16:20). Some disobeyed in going out on the seventh day to collect it, but found none. God was faithful. He provided food for them even when they grumbled and complained, when they did not have faith that He would provide for them day by day.

The third incident deals with water again, recorded at the opening of chapter 17. This is a bit later as they are journeying south to Mt. Sinai at a place called Rephidim. This time the complaints were so strong that Moses feared the people would kill him (17:4). God told him to take the rod or staff, go with some of the elders in front of the people to Mt. Horeb (another name for Mt. Sinai), where God had originally called him. God told him to strike the rock He would indicate with the staff and water would come out. He did, and it did.

The people threatened and bullied, rather than praying. Yet God was faithful. He demonstrated His power and care once again as He provided water for them. God is *forever faithful*. Even when Israel did not learn to trust Him from His gracious, miraculous works, He was faithful to show them His glory and provide for them.

God is also faithful to us when we complain and grumble. One writer tells us,

“To complain of the age we live in, to murmur at the present possessors of power, to lament the past, to conceive extravagant hopes of the future, are the common dispositions of the greatest part of mankind ... Such complaints ... have existed in all times.”<sup>1</sup>

While this describes the present day, it was written by Edmund Burke in 1770. Most people don’t get concerned about a bit of complaining, after all, “Don’t we all do it?” In the family—husbands and wives, kids and parents. We complain about our government leaders. We complain about our employers, coworkers and friends. We complain about the church. When we complain and grumble about people and things God brings into our lives we are, as Moses told Israel, complaining about God Himself (e.g., 17:2).

God addresses this sin directly in the Bible. Philippians 2:14-16 tells us

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life...”

James 5:9 puts it plainly, “Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.”

Complaining and grumbling are sin. Thankfully, however, our sin does not result in God not being faithful to us. God’s faithfulness is part of His unchanging character, as Psalm 100 tells us, “the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His *faithfulness* to all generations” (5). Isaiah described the Messiah, Jesus Christ, “righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and *faithfulness* the belt about His waist” (11:5). As a belt was foundational to their clothing in that day, so righteous and *faithfulness* are foundational to Christ’s unchanging character.

That does not give us latitude for taking complaining and grumbling lightly.

- Part of God’s faithfulness is to discipline us.
- Part of His faithfulness is to be merciful so we will *realize* and *repent* of our sins (e.g., Romans 2:4).
- Part of God’s faithfulness is to give us the fulness of life and rewards for our being faithful.

*God is forever faithful for His glory and our good.* He is faithful when we are not, and He is...

### **Faithful When We Are.**

In the latter part of chapter 17 we see God being faithful to the Israelites as they were faithful when being attacked by the Amalakites. As Israel followed God leading them by the pillar of cloud and fire they were attacked by the Amalakites. Deuteronomy 25 fills in a few extra details,

“Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God” (17-18).

Moses put Joshua in charge of the troops while he, in obvious but unstated obedience to God’s directions, went to the top of a hill with “the staff of God” (17:19). You recall the account: Israel prevailed only when Moses held the staff up. Throughout the day he, quite naturally, became tired and so was given a stone to sit on and Aaron and Hur helped hold his arm and the staff up until the end of the day and Israel had routed the Amalakites.

There has been much in the way of assumption, speculation, reading into the text and even fanciful ideas about this event. While prayer is not mentioned in the text, it quite often is read into it, both positively and negatively for Moses. Scripture interprets Scripture. Let’s do that here. After the battle Moses built an altar for worship and called it “The LORD is my Banner” (17:15). The *banner* was actually a pole (with or without a flag attached) that identified the leader of the troops and could also be a rallying point. Moses is telling us that his, and so the people’s identity and victory was in God.

Then think about “the staff of God” here in Exodus. It is first mentioned in chapter 4. It was Moses’ staff for tending sheep. God told him to throw it on the ground; it became a snake. The He told him to pick the snake up by its tail; it became a staff again. It was a symbol of God’s power. This demonstration of God’s power was repeated before the Pharaoh in chapter 7. Then in the same chapter God told Moses to lift the staff over the Nile River, and the river turned to blood. In chapter 8 God told him to do it again and frogs appeared all over the land. Then He told him to strike the ground with it, and gnats appeared.

Moses’ staff in itself was just a stick. But as “the staff of God” it symbolized and pointed to God and His great power. The key lesson here is obedience and faithfulness. Moses, as the representative of the people before God, was faithful in doing what God told him to do even when he did not understand what would happen or how it would all work. Here he held the staff up during the battle as an act of faith in God and God’s power to give them the victory. Moses was faithful to God and God, in His faithfulness, displayed His power and blessed Israel with victory.

God is faithful to us when we are faithful to Him in the battles we face. Let’s zero in on our daily, unrelenting spiritual battles. This reality is clear in Scripture. Many of us are familiar with Ephesians 6:10-20 where Paul tells us about God’s protection and resources for this battle and how we are to wage it. This instruction is not about theoretical or occasional battles, but is literally about every day life, and every moment of each day. So continually “take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm” (6:13). And 2 Thessalonians 3:3 assures us “the Lord is *faithful*, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.”

Yes, God is faithful to us in this battle.

- 2 Corinthians 2:14 says “thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.” *God is faithful.*
- In Philippians 1:6 Paul tells us, “I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a wood work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” *God is faithful.*
- God is faithful to us in our battle with temptation and sin. You can have victory because “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is *faithful*, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” (13). *God is faithful.*
- And when we do sin, “If we confess our sins, [God] is *faithful* and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). *God is faithful.*
- “God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). *God is faithful.*

So, as the writer of Hebrews tells us, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is *faithful*” (10:23).

*God is forever faithful for His glory and our good.* He is faithful when we are not and when we are. There is one more thing to note about God’s faithfulness here. God is ...

### **Faithful With A Purpose.**

The first and supreme purpose of God’s faithfulness is to bring glory to Himself. When the people grumbled about food, God told Moses and Aaron to tell them

“At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD” (16:6b-7a).

God works all things according to His own will and ultimately for His own glory; to display, to make visible His perfect character of holiness and righteousness, of love and mercy.

Later, when the scouts came back from checking out the land God was giving Israel and ten of the twelve painted a hopeless picture, the people complained, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! [sound familiar?] Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” (Numbers 14:2-3). God tested Moses and offered to start all over with new people raised up through him. Moses met the test by interceding for the people based on the character and promises of God. Then God answered, “I have pardoned them according to your word; but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the *glory* of the LORD” (20-21).

Always remember, never forget, the first and supreme purpose of God’s faithfulness is to bring glory to Himself.

A second part of the purpose of God’s faithfulness is to care for us. We have seen God’s care for Israel time after time, all the time in these first seventeen chapters of Exodus. Here in this section we saw it

- when the only water available was bitter and God made it sweet.
- When they were running out of food and God provided quail and manna.
- When there was no water and God gave them water.
- When they were attacked by the Amalakites and God gave them victory.

Forty years later as the people prepared to enter their land, God reminded them

“the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing” (Deuteronomy 2:7).

As it was, so it is. The apostle Paul tells us that “God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). That is part of His care for you. Not might supply. Not will supply now and then. Not will supply most of the time. God in His faithfulness will supply all your needs *according to*, in line with His limitless riches in Christ Jesus. We can’t explore this today, but we need to note that:

- that this does not mean life is or should be easy with health, wealth and everything we want or think we need;
- that just as 1 Corinthians 10:13 is true for every temptation you and I face, God’s faithfulness to supply all our needs, what He knows we need for as long as He keeps us here, is true;
- and that it is important to wrap ourselves around this truth in the good and easy times to be able to see and rest in it in the bad and difficult times.

God is faithful to bring glory to Himself, to care for us and also to teach, test and discipline us so we can grow in faith and faithfulness. Now, we might be okay with and even enjoy being taught. But I doubt that many of us would rush to the head of the line for testing and discipline. These three elements go together. They are a package.

Note God’s word and action on this in today’s section. At Marah, the place with bitter water, chapter 15:25-26,

“Then [Moses] cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. And He said, ‘If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.’”

When Israel grumbled about food in chapter 16, and God provided manna, He told them only to take only enough for the day except for on the sixth day when they were to take enough for the Sabbath as well. But some took extra. Some went out on the seventh day. Notice what God said about this in 16:28. “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions?” Or, from the positive side, “Why don’t you obey in faith? Pass the test!”

When God teaches us, He tests us on that truth. When we disobey, His disciplines us. The purpose is not to show how slow we are to learn nor how sinful we are, but to help us grow in faith and obedience. After Moses delivered God’s ten commandments in chapter 20 and the people saw lightning and smoke and heard thunder, he told the people “Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin” (20).

One of the best summaries of this truth is the found in the opening verses of Deuteronomy chapter 8.

“All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your forefathers. You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him” (1-6).

## Conclusion.

*God is forever faithful for His glory and our good.* Wherever you are at in your relationship with God, there are two sides of this truth I want you to take with you into the next moments that you spend with God on your own. First, God is *Forever Faithful*, but never, ever presume on God’s merciful, patient faithfulness. Remember Romans 2:4, “do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?” If there are things you know you should change, should or should not be and be doing, don’t delay any longer. Clear them up with God now.

Secondly, God is *Forever Faithful*, you can count on it! If you are a believer, you’ve already trusted your life and eternal destiny to God’s faithfulness to do for you what He said He would do. So today, thank God and rejoice in His faithfulness. Even if you cannot see it, if it does not seem He is being and doing all He said He would, embrace and cling to this truth — *God is forever faithful to you.*

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<sup>1</sup> Burke, Edmund. *Thoughts On The Cause Of The Present Discontents*, 1770. In *Select Works of Edmund Burke*, Vol. 1, page 71. © 1999 by Liberty Fund, Inc.

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