

The Bread and Water of Life

Sabbath Afternoon, August 9

Many look back to the Israelites, and marvel at their unbelief and murmuring, feeling that they themselves would not have been so ungrateful; but when their faith is tested, even by little trials, they manifest no more faith or patience than did ancient Israel.

God had promised to be their God, to take them to Himself as a people, and to lead them to a large and good land; but they were ready to faint at every obstacle encountered in the way to that land. . . . They forgot their bitter service in Egypt. They forgot the goodness and power of God displayed in their behalf in their deliverance from bondage. They forgot how their children had been spared when the destroying angel slew all the first-born of Egypt. They forgot the grand exhibition of divine power at the Red Sea. They forgot that while they had crossed safely in the path that had been opened for them, the armies of their enemies, attempting to follow them, had been overwhelmed by the waters of the sea. They saw and felt only their present inconveniences and trials; and instead of saying, "God has done great things for us; whereas we were slaves, He is making of us a great nation," they talked of the hardness of the way, and wondered when their weary pilgrimage would end.

The history of the wilderness life of Israel was chronicled for the benefit of the Israel of God to the close of time. The record of God's dealing with the wanderers of the desert in all their marchings to and fro, in their exposure to hunger, thirst, and weariness, and in the striking manifestations of His power for their relief, is fraught with warning and instruction for His people in all ages. The varied experience of the Hebrews was a school of preparation for their promised home in Canaan. God would have His people in these days review with a humble heart and teachable spirit the trials through which ancient Israel passed, that they may be instructed in their preparation for the heavenly Canaan. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 94.

The sin of the Egyptians was that they had refused the light which God had so graciously sent to them through Joseph. While many accepted that light, of many more it could be said, God is not in all their thoughts. And the message sent to testify to them of God's displeasure was, "Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." Christ died for every soul in Egypt, and every soul was to have the light. The righteous were not to be excluded from the wicked, but kept by the power of God from receiving the mold and spot of the transgressor. —"God's Representatives [Moses]," *Youth's Instructor*, April 15, 1897, par. 7.

Sunday, August 10

Bitter Waters

From the Red Sea the hosts of Israel again set forth on their journey, under the guidance of the pillar of cloud. The scene around them was most dreary—bare, desolate-looking mountains, barren plains, and the sea stretching far away, its shores strewn with the bodies of their enemies; yet they were full of joy in the consciousness of freedom, and every thought of discontent was hushed.

But for three days, as they journeyed, they could find no water. The supply which they had taken with them was exhausted. There was nothing to quench their burning thirst as they dragged wearily over the sun-burnt plains. Moses, who was familiar with this region, knew what the others did not, that at Marah, the nearest station where springs were to be found, the water was unfit for use. With intense anxiety he watched the guiding cloud. With a sinking heart he heard the glad shout. “Water! water!” echoed along the line. Men, women, and children in joyous haste crowded to the fountain, when, lo, a cry of anguish burst forth from the host—the water was bitter. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 291.

Soon their faith was tested. The Lord would know how much He could depend on His people to be true and loyal to Him. They went three days journey into the wilderness, and found no water. “And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah: for they were bitter.” Did the people then show their faith in God, because of the evidence they had received that Christ, wrapped in the fold of the cloud, that His glory might not destroy them, was leading them in person? “The people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” [Verses 23, 24.] Instead of trusting and fearing the Lord, believing in Him under apparently discouraging circumstances, they cast reflections upon their leader. So people act in this generation. Satan’s plan of temptation is always the same. While everything moves prosperously, men think that they have faith. But when suffering, disaster, or disappointment comes, they lose heart. A faith that is dependent on circumstances and surroundings, that lives only when everything goes smoothly, is not a genuine faith.

In his trouble, Moses cried to the Lord. This is what the children of Israel, so recently delivered, ought to have done. The Lord heard the cry of His servant, against whom the people had said so many bitter things. He showed Moses a tree, “which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.” It was not the virtue of the tree that turned the bitter water to sweet; it was the power of Him who was enshrouded in the pillar of cloud, the One who can do all things. “There he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord that healeth thee.” [Verses 25, 26.] —*Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 11, Letter 49a, 1896, par. 3, 4.

Quail and Manna

From Marah the people journeyed to Elim where they found “twelve wells of water and three-score and ten palm trees.” In this delightful spot they remained several days before entering the wilderness of sin. When they had been a month away from Egypt, they made their first encampment in this wilderness. Their store of provisions had now begun to fail. There was scanty herbage in the wilderness and their flocks also were fast diminishing. Famine seemed to be staring them in the face, and as they followed the cloudy pillar over the desert wastes, doubts filled their hearts, and again they murmured, even the rulers and elders of the people joined in complaining against the leaders of God’s appointment: “Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, and when we did eat bread to the full! for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” The children of Israel seemed to possess an evil heart of unbelief. They were unwilling to endure hardships in the wilderness. When they met with difficulties, they would regard them as insurmountable obstacles. Their confidence would fail, and they would see nothing before them but death.

They had not really suffered the pangs of hunger. They had food for the present necessities, but they feared for the future. They could not see how the hosts of Israel were to subsist, in their long travels through the wilderness; and in their unbelief they saw their children famishing. The Lord was willing that their supply of food should be cut short, and that they should meet with difficulties, that their hearts might turn to Him who had hitherto delivered them. He was ready to be to them a present help. If, in their want, they would call upon him, he would manifest to them tokens of his love and continual care. But they were unwilling to trust the Lord any further than they could witness before their eyes the continual evidences of his power. If they had possessed true faith and a firm confidence in God, inconveniences and obstacles, or even real suffering, would have been cheerfully borne, after the Lord had wrought in such a wonderful manner for their deliverance from bondage. —“Journeyings of the Israelites,” *Signs of the Times*, April 8, 1880, par. 5, 6.

The manna, falling from heaven for the sustenance of Israel, was a type of Him who came from God to give life to the world. Said Jesus, “I am that Bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven. . . . If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” John 6:48-51. And among the promises of blessing to God’s people in the future life it is written, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.” Revelation 2:17. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 297.

Water From the Rock

After leaving the wilderness of Sin, the Israelites encamped in Rephidim. Here there was no water, and again they distrusted the providence of God. In their blindness and presumption the people came to Moses with the demand, "Give us water that we may drink." But his patience failed not. "Why chide ye with me?" he said; "wherefore do ye tempt the Lord?" They cried in anger, "Wherefore is this, that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" When they had been so abundantly supplied with food, they remembered with shame their unbelief and murmurings, and promised to trust the Lord in the future; but they soon forgot their promise, and failed at the first trial of their faith. The pillar of cloud that was leading them seemed to veil a fearful mystery. And Moses—who was he? they questioned, and what could be his object in bringing them from Egypt? Suspicion and distrust filled their hearts, and they boldly accused him of designing to kill them and their children by privations and hardships that he might enrich himself with their possessions. In the tumult of rage and indignation they were about to stone him.

In distress Moses cried to the Lord, "What shall I do unto this people?" He was directed to take the elders of Israel and the rod wherewith he had wrought wonders in Egypt, and to go on before the people. And the Lord said unto him, "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink." He obeyed, and the waters burst forth in a living stream that abundantly supplied the encampment. Instead of commanding Moses to lift up his rod and call down some terrible plague, like those on Egypt, upon the leaders in this wicked murmuring, the Lord in His great mercy made the rod His instrument to work their deliverance. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 297, 298.

"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The condition of the people made this appeal very forcible. They had been engaged in a continued scene of pomp and festivity, their eyes had been dazzled with light and color, and their ears regaled with the richest music; but there had been nothing in all this round of ceremonies to meet the wants of the spirit, nothing to satisfy the thirst of the soul for that which perishes not. Jesus invited them to come and drink of the fountain of life, of that which would be in them a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life.

The priest had that morning performed the ceremony which commemorated the smiting of the rock in the wilderness. That rock was a symbol of Him who by His death would cause living streams of salvation to flow to all who are athirst. Christ's words were the water of life. There in the presence of the assembled multitude He set Himself apart to be smitten, that the water of life might flow to the world. In smiting Christ, Satan thought to destroy the Prince of life; but from the smitten rock there flowed living water. —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 453, 454.

Jethro

Before Moses had left Egypt he sent back his wife and children to his father-in-law. And after Jethro heard of the wonderful deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, he visited Moses in the wilderness, and brought his wife and children to him. "And Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare, and they came into the tent. And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done unto Pharaoh, and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the Lord delivered them. And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, Blessed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods; for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly, he was above them. And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt-offering and sacrifices for God. And Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law, before God."

Jethro's discerning eye soon saw that the burdens upon Moses were very great, as the people brought all their matters of difficulty to him, and he instructed them in regard to the statutes and law of God. He said to Moses, "Hearken now unto my voice. I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee. Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God. And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover, thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, and rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all seasons. And it shall be that every great matter they shall bring unto thee; but every small matter they shall judge. So shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law, and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons. The hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves. And Moses let his father-in-law depart; and he went his way into his own land."

Moses was not above being instructed by his father-in-law. God had exalted him greatly and wrought wonders by his hand. Yet Moses did not reason that God had chosen him to instruct others, and had accomplished wonderful things by his hand, and he therefore needed not to be instructed. He gladly listened to the suggestions of his father-in-law, and adopted his plan as a wise arrangement. —*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 259–261.

The Bread and Water of Life

The world's Redeemer knows the necessities of every soul. When we are oppressed and languid, he knows it, and he it is that supplies the spiritual refreshment. Ask ye of him; watch unto prayer, and it will come. Jesus is the bread of life, to be eaten every day; he is the water of life to the parched and fainting soul, and all may partake of his grace.

Earth's cisterns will often be emptied, its pools become dry; but in Christ there is a living spring from which we may continually draw. However much we draw and give to others, an abundance will remain. There is no danger of exhausting the supply; for Christ is the inexhaustible well-spring of truth. He has been the fountain of living water ever since the fall of Adam. He says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." And "whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." — "Jesus at the Well of Sychar: The Water of Life," *Signs of the Times*, April 22, 1897, par. 20, 21.

Jesus knew the wants of the soul. Pomp, riches, and honor cannot satisfy the heart. "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me." The rich, the poor, the high, the low, are alike welcome. He promises to relieve the burdened mind, to comfort the sorrowing, and to give hope to the despondent. Many of those who heard Jesus were mourners over disappointed hopes, many were nourishing a secret grief, many were seeking to satisfy their restless longing with the things of the world and the praise of men; but when all was gained, they found that they had toiled only to reach a broken cistern, from which they could not quench their thirst. Amid the glitter of the joyous scene they stood, dissatisfied and sad. That sudden cry, "If any man thirst," startled them from their sorrowful meditation, and as they listened to the words that followed, their minds kindled with a new hope. The Holy Spirit presented the symbol before them until they saw in it the offer of the priceless gift of salvation.

The cry of Christ to the thirsty soul is still going forth, and it appeals to us with even greater power than to those who heard it in the temple on that last day of the feast. The fountain is open for all. The weary and exhausted ones are offered the refreshing draught of eternal life. Jesus is still crying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Revelation 22:17; John 4:14. — *The Desire of Ages*, p. 454.

Friday, August 15

For Further Reading

"Hands Toward Heaven," *Conflict and Courage*, March 30, p. 95.

"The Bread of Life," *Youth's Instructor*, November 11, 1897, par. 1–7.