

Bible Stories

IN THE DESERT

Exodus 19:7-8

August 13, 2022

In spectacular fashion, Yahweh had shown up and revealed Himself as **DELIVERER** to the Children of Israel and the ultimate **CLEANER OF CLOCKS** to the Egyptians. Egypt had been left in tatters, but it was only after 10 plagues that Pharaoh had finally released his grip – but only for a moment..... The moment he got over his shock and grief, he was on the trail of those pesky slaves.

This time he had them. Moses had made a mistake. He had led Israel into a dead-end. Mountains on one side - the Red Sea in front of them - some pretty ticked off Egyptians blocking their escape. They had nowhere to go.

GOTCHA!!

NOT. SO. FAST.

- **Exodus 14:19-28** - And the angel of God who was going before the camp of Israel set out and went behind them. And the column of cloud set out ahead of them, and it stood *still* behind them, so *that* it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel. And it was a dark cloud, but it gave light to the night, so *that* neither approached the other all night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and Yahweh moved the sea with a strong east wind all night, and he made the sea *become* dry ground, and the waters were divided. And the [Israelites] entered the middle of the sea on the dry land. The waters *were* a wall for them on their right and on their left. And *the* Egyptians gave chase and entered after them—all the horses of Pharaoh, his chariots, and his charioteers—into the middle of the sea. And during the morning watch, Yahweh looked down to the Egyptian camp *from* in the column of fire and cloud, and he threw the Egyptian camp into a panic. And he removed the wheels of their chariots so *that* they drove them with difficulty, and *the* Egyptians said, "We must flee away from Israel because Yahweh *is* fighting for them against Egypt." And Yahweh said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, and let the waters return over *the* Egyptians, over their chariots, and over their charioteers." And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned [at daybreak] to its normal level, and *the* Egyptians *were* fleeing [because of it], and Yahweh swept *the* Egyptians into the middle of the sea. And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the charioteers—all the army of Pharaoh coming after them into the sea. Not [even] one survived among them.

Yahweh had done what only He could do and Israel was now free. The vast desert spread out before them in all its starkness and beauty.

With Yahweh's mighty acts on their behalf still vivid in their minds Israel started out from the edge of the Red Sea and into the unknown....

What could possibly go wrong?

What do you think the people expected? An easy, pothole free, road to the Promised Land? An oasis on every corner? No problems, no struggles, no inconvenience? Surely a God who parts seas can provide a trouble-free journey to the Land of milk and honey.

However, 3 days in....

- **Exodus 15:23-24** - They came to Marah, and they were not able to drink water from Marah because it was bitter.... And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"

Yahweh provided water.

6 weeks later....

- **Exodus 16:2-3** - All the community of the Israelites grumbled against Moses and against Aaron in the desert. And the Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread until we were full, because you have brought us out to this desert to kill all of this assembly with hunger."

Yahweh provided food – for the next 40 years.

They community started out again, but they didn't get far before, you guessed it – they ran out of water. Instead of saying, "**Hey, this happened once before and Yahweh came through.**" they began to complain.

- **Exodus 17:3** - and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

Do you see a pattern developing?

Even though Yahweh had proven faithful at every turn, the journey to the Land of milk and honey was just too difficult. This was not what they had signed up for, so their default position became that of complainers.

A few weeks later they arrived at Sinai. The mountain of the burning bush promises:

- **Exodus 3:7-8** - I have heard their cry of distress because of their oppressors, for I know their sufferings. ⁸ And I have come down to deliver them from the hand of *the* Egyptians and to bring them up from this land to a good and wide land, to a land flowing with milk and honey....

Yahweh gave the people the 10 Commandments and the laws to govern their new society.

He promised to be their God and they had promised to be His people. ***“All that Yahweh has spoken we will do”*** they had said.

But then, Yahweh called Moses to the top of the mountain

- **Exodus 24:18** - And Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

While Moses was basking in the presence of Yahweh as He outlined the form and function of the Tabernacle, the people were beginning to get worried and restless. What had happened to Moses? Did he die? Did he abandon them?

Brought into a moment of perceived crisis, they forgot everything God had done and all they had promised to do and went back to what they knew – gods they could see and touch.

So much for, ***“All that Yahweh has spoken we will do.”***

To Aaron’s door they went:

- **Exodus 32:1** - “Come, make for us gods who will go before us, because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

For me, the most amazing – and not in a good way – part of this story is Aaron’s actions on that day.

Aaron, who had stood boldly beside Moses as the 10 plagues fell.

Aaron, who had stood in the very presence of Yahweh {**Exodus 24:9-11**}.

Said, ***“bring me all your jewelry”***, cast an image of a calf, built an altar then declared, ***“tomorrow we’ll have a feast for Yahweh.”***

He connected the worship of Yahweh **WITH** idol worship. He blurred the lines, and reduced the God of the Universe to just another god in the minds of the people. By that one act, Aaron planted a weed Israel would never fully escape from.

Just..... WOW!

After Yahweh, told Moses, ***“Your people, the ones you brought out of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.”*** Moses headed down the mountain.

What he saw shocked him – a full on orgy in the presence of a golden calf idol.

With deliberate action, Moses raised the 10 Commandment tablets – the symbol of the covenant – above his head and threw them to the ground.

For his part, Aaron was happy to place the blame on Israel. ***“Don’t be mad at me - You know how they are..... They said ‘make us a god.’ All I did was throw their jewelry in the fire – and amazingly out popped this calf!”*** Again, just WOW!!

Judgment was swift, but more importantly, Yahweh did not abandon Israel {As I, without question, would have done}.

However, what they had done was incompatible with His holiness, so in order to protect them from instant destruction, Yahweh excused Himself:

- **Exodus 33:1-11** - And Yahweh spoke to Moses, “Go, go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land that I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your offspring.’ ² And I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, and the Hittites and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, ³ Go to a land flowing with milk and honey, but I will

not go up among you, because you *are* a stiff-necked people, lest I destroy you on the way.”⁴ And the people heard this troubling word, and they mourned, and they each did not put their ornaments on themselves. ⁵ And Yahweh said to Moses, “Say to the [Israelites], ‘You *are* a stiff-necked people; *if* one moment I were to go up among you, I would destroy you. And now take down your ornaments from on you, and I will [decide] what I will do to you.”⁶ And the [Israelites] stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb *onward*. ⁷ And Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp far from the camp, and he called it the tent of assembly, [and] all seeking Yahweh would go out to the tent of assembly, which was outside the camp. ⁸ [And] at the going out of Moses to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each at the opening of his tent, and gaze after Moses until his entering the tent. ⁹ [And] at the entering of Moses *into* the tent the column of cloud would descend and stand *at* the opening of the tent, and he would speak with Moses. ¹⁰ And all the people would see the column of cloud standing *at* the opening of the tent, and all the people would rise and bow in worship, each *at* the opening of his tent. ¹¹ And Yahweh would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his neighbor.....

What do we do with this story?

Delivering Israel from Egypt, parting the Red Sea, providing water and food for a million + people was not a significant challenge for God. His challenge was delivering Israel from their mental and spiritual captivity.

They were quick to praise and worship their warrior God when things were going their way, but equally quick to complain and rebel and look for the quickest road back to physical captivity when things went **“wrong.”**

Israel wanted physical freedom, but not heart change. They were content to remain mental, emotional and spiritual slaves.

God wanted to take them to the Land of Promise – A land they were not yet ready for.....

- **Ellen White {PP 292-293}**: 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. In a marvelous manner He had brought them out from their bondage in Egypt, that He might elevate and ennoble them and make them a praise in the earth. But it was necessary for them to encounter difficulties and to endure privations. God was bringing them from a state of degradation and fitting them to occupy an honorable place among the nations and to receive important and sacred trusts. Had they possessed faith in Him, in view of all that He had wrought for them, they would cheerfully have borne inconvenience, privation, and even real suffering; **but they were unwilling to trust** the Lord any further than they could witness the continual evidences of His power. **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.

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. When brought into strait places, they murmur at the process by which God has chosen to purify them. Though their present needs are supplied, many are unwilling to trust God for the future.

Hmmm.....