

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF
EXODUS –

PART FOUR – THE PRESSURES ON THE BEGINNER

The great escape had succeeded! The Israelites had miraculously walked free from slavery in Egypt to begin a new life in their own land, as we walked free from the penalty and power of sin when we came to the cross of Christ. They left Egypt by ‘death’ to a self run life and ‘resurrection’ to a new life in Christ at the Red Sea. They celebrated joyfully. Three days later they were faced with bitter water at Marah and they complained.(15) The memories of past hurts can be bitter, but Moses’ stick, a picture of the cross,(Jn.3:14) made the water, a picture of the Holy Spirit sweet.(Jn.7:37-39) Nothing could surely now go wrong as they sat down by the palm fringed oasis of Elim to enjoy life? But life moves on and soon they were in an empty barren desert with no food and no supermarket. Just as we do, they immediately blamed their leaders, Moses and Aaron, and by implication God. They thought back to Egypt with very selective memories of the supposed good food they had eaten whenever they wanted. With infinite patience, God promised to feed them with manna in the morning and quails in the evening. The manna would be delivered from heaven every morning except the Sabbath. Every family were to gather for themselves. There would always be enough but there would never be any left for the next day. Jesus described Himself as the ‘living bread that came down out of heaven’.(Jn.6:51) The knowledge of Him in His word will feed us and strengthen us for every day as families. There will always be enough however little we think we know and there is no way that today’s relationship with Jesus will be adequate for tomorrow. Our relationship with Him needs to be fresh. ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’(Matt.6:11) The Sabbath was to be more than a day off work. It was a day to have time as a family to enjoy the Lord without distraction. They were instructed to keep a jar full of manna in the future tabernacle as a reminder for all time of the secret of a daily relationship with God.(16)

The next crisis came soon after when the water they had carried from Elim finally ran out. Again they were thirsty as we as Christians are thirsty for life and real purpose. Once more they blamed Moses, and so God, and assumed that Moses had brought them there to kill them! Moses had learned by now when he was criticized to take the problem to God and not to keep it as his own.(I Pet.5:7) The answer once more was to be the stick in his hand which he had used in Egypt to demonstrate God’s power over sin, at the Red Sea to open a way through death and resurrection, and at Marah to sweeten the water. Every answer in our Christian lives starts at the cross. This time he was to use the stick to hit a rock which cracked open releasing all the fresh water they could drink. Paul explained this story in I Cor.10:4 when he said, ‘The rock was Christ.’ Jesus was struck by the cross for our sin, releasing the Holy Spirit into our lives. Repeatedly the Rock will be used in the rest of the Bible as a picture of Jesus our Redeemer.(Deut.32:4; II Sam.22:2)

No sooner had they refilled their water containers than a bully arrived to intimidate them. Amalek, one of the sons of Esau, had produced a nation which like his father had no interest in God and opposed God’s purpose for His people at every opportunity. A crowd of slaves with no experience of defending themselves, and no weapons to do it with, were no match for this battle hardened desert tribe. In the early days of our Christian lives we will face attack from the world around us that thinks they can bully us into conforming and compromise. What was the answer? As usual it was the stick in Moses’ hand. All he had to do, as at the Red Sea, was to hold it up in the air and Amalek would lose. Moses started well and Israel were winning, but like us he soon tired of looking to God and they began to lose. His two friends Aaron and Hur stood with him, holding his hands up while he sat on a rock, and again Joshua and his army won. Looking to the cross of Christ is a team activity in which we stand together particularly with those who are new

in Christ.(Gal.6:2) God warned Israel that Amalek would be an ongoing problem through their history whom they would have to continue to trust Him to deal with.(17)

When Moses returned to Egypt to bring out his people, he had left his wife and two sons in the care of his father, Jethro. Now they met again in the wilderness and were united as a family. Jethro was described as 'the priest of Midian'. Though not an Israelite he had a relationship with God. Even in the Old Testament anyone, anywhere, whose heart was open to God would come to know Him. Seeing what God had done for the Israelites impressed Jethro deeply, and clearly greatly increased his knowledge of the God whom in a simple sense he knew already. He and Moses enjoyed fellowship together. As he watched Moses at work he recognized a problem which is common to those young in Christ but full of zeal and enthusiasm. Moses was too busy to be as effective as he might be. He was trying to fix everybody's problem in the entire nation of Israel. He was in danger of burning himself out. Jethro showed great wisdom when he took Moses aside and offered some good advice. Rather than Moses hearing every case himself it would surely make much more sense for him to train other leaders to share this responsibility. By teaching these leaders the word of God which they would then need to apply in the various problems which were brought to them, Moses could greatly multiply his ministry and the blessing which came to others when they learned how God saw their problems. An essential condition for selection to play this role was the right attitude of heart, and so people who were teachable, loved the Lord and incorruptible. The same conditions are taught in the New Testament for the selection of leaders for any task.(Acts 6:3,5,8; Titus 1:5-9) Training a team who in turn can train others is still the secret of church growth without burnout.(II Tim.2:2) Moses had the good sense to listen to wise advice and to concentrate on the more difficult problems which needed his greater experience.(18)

Now they were ready for more serious teaching from God!

SOME QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. How does the story of God feeding His people in the wilderness apply to us today? How might Jesus have had this account in mind when He fed the 5000 and later the 4000 in the New Testament?(Jn.6; Matt.15:32-39) Why were they not allowed to keep spare food over till the next day?(chapter 16)
2. How does the rock being struck with a stick to release water help us today when we are struggling with finding meaning and satisfaction in life? Why did God rebuke Moses in Numbers 20:1-13 when he tried to repeat the same process? How does this story explain Jesus' parable in Matt.7:24-27 and His promise in Matt.16:18? In what way does the attack by Amalek picture the problems we face as new Christians? How does holding up the cross give us victory?(chapter 17)
3. Give examples of how we make the same mistake Moses made, as young Christians seeking to be leaders? What danger is there in not setting the same qualifications Jethro required?(chapter 18)