

SESSION 2

OUR HEALER

▶ **The Point**

God is the only one who can restore us and make us whole.

▶ **The Passage**

Exodus 14:29-31; 15:22-27

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Works of art like Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper* are universally recognized as great masterpieces, but most people don't realize the images we admire are quite different from what da Vinci first painted. *Mona Lisa* has darkened over time because of the varnishes used on it. Original fine details are now obscured. *The Last Supper* has deteriorated due to mildew. Early on, well-meaning painters attempted to clean it and repaint sections. In the process, they covered up da Vinci's actual work. Restoration is needed when we want to return to the artist's original design.

When left to themselves, objects like art, houses, and old cars lose their luster and even fall apart. And so do we. When left to ourselves, we drift from God's original plan and design for our lives. We take our eyes off Him. We often complain about Him while forgetting all He has done for us. In short, we need restoration and healing. In the Book of Exodus, the Israelites lost their focus, yet God showed Himself to be the God who restores. He is the Lord, our Healer.

▶ **The Setting**

The Israelites had known nothing but slavery for centuries. But that changed when Yahweh, the one true God, sent His spokesman Moses to the Egyptian Pharaoh demanding that the Israelites be released from their captivity. As God displayed His might and mercy both in the Israelites' exodus from Egypt and their time of wandering in the wilderness, He called the Israelites into covenant relationship with Himself, a relationship demanding both trust in and obedience to Yahweh.

What does the Bible say?

Feared (14:31)—The Hebrew term translated *feared* has a range of meaning from frightened and terrified to a sense of awe and reverence.

Wilderness of Shur

(15:22)—A rocky and barren region in what today is the northeastern part of Egypt in the Sinai Peninsula stretching to the east as far as the Negev in Israel.

The LORD who heals

(15:26)—The Hebrew term, *Yahweh Rophe*, refers to God’s merciful intervention and includes the meanings of healing, forgiveness, and restoration.

Exodus 14:29-31; 15:22-27

14:29 But the Israelites had walked through the sea on dry ground, with the waters like a wall to them on their right and their left.

30 That day the LORD saved Israel from the power of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

31 When Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and believed in him and in his servant Moses.

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15:22 Then Moses led Israel on from the Red Sea, and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur. They journeyed for three days in the wilderness without finding water.

23 They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water at Marah because it was bitter—that is why it was named Marah.

24 The people grumbled to Moses, “What are we going to drink?”

25 So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree. When he threw it into the water, the water became drinkable.

The LORD made a statute and ordinance for them at Marah, and he tested them there.

26 He said, “If you will carefully obey the LORD your God, do what is right in his sight, pay attention to his commands, and keep all his statutes, I will not inflict any illnesses on you that I inflicted on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you.”

27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy date palms, and they camped there by the water.

Exodus 14:29-31 Commentary

[Verse 29] God worked powerfully on behalf of the Israelites in delivering them from slavery in Egypt. After He freed the Israelites, God “led the people around toward the Red Sea along the road of the wilderness” (Ex. 13:18). But Pharaoh soon changed his mind about allowing the Israelites to go free, and set out in pursuit of the Israelites with his army. (See 14:5-9.)

When the Israelites saw that the Egyptian army was overtaking them on the shore of the Red Sea, they panicked. “The Israelites were terrified and cried out to the LORD for help” (v. 10). Rather than remembering and taking confidence in the fact that God, who had won their freedom through inflicting the ten plagues upon the Egyptians, was with them, the Israelites saw only the large, well-armed force of Egyptians in chariots closing in on them. Although they cried out to the Lord, they quickly turned on the Lord’s chosen representative, Moses. (See vv. 11-12.)

Moses responded by telling the Israelites, “Don’t be afraid. Stand firm and see the LORD’s salvation that he will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you must be quiet” (vv. 13-14). God told Moses to stretch the staff in his hand over the sea. When Moses obeyed, the waters parted and all the Israelites **walked through the sea on dry ground** between the two walls of water to the other side of the sea. (See vv. 21-22.) When the Egyptians came after them, God told Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea again. After Moses obeyed, the waters came back together and the entire Egyptian army drowned. (See vv. 26-28.)

[Verse 30] Moses had encouraged the Israelites to trust in the Lord for their salvation from the Egyptians and God had delivered them: **That day the LORD saved Israel from the power of the Egyptians.** At daybreak, as the Israelites looked back toward the sea, they saw that the waters had returned to the seabed and that **the Egyptians were dead on the seashore.**

[Verse 31] Whereas the Lord had brought ruin and death upon Pharaoh’s army, God had brought deliverance to the Israelites. Having seen the demonstration of the **great power** of the Lord in delivering them from the Egyptians, the Israelites **feared the LORD.** The Hebrew term for *feared* (*yare*) is the same word used to describe the terror the Israelites had felt at the approach of the Egyptian army. (See v. 10.) Depending on the context, the term can be used to express fear and terror or it can be used to express respect and awe. At this stage in the Israelites’ relationship with God, their response to God’s demonstration of His power was probably a lot closer to fear in the sense of fright than it was to awe.⁴ Not only did the Israelites now fear the Lord; God’s act in saving the Israelites caused them to believe in the Lord as well. Fear of the Lord was accompanied by faith in the Lord. The Israelites **believed in God and in his servant Moses.** “They believed his [God’s] promises and sang his praise” (Ps. 106:12).

Exodus 15:22-24 Commentary

[Verses 22-23] Although the Israelites believed in God after He delivered them from the Egyptians at the Red Sea, it did not take long for the Israelites to lose their focus on God and fall back into complaining about the difficulties they were facing. After Moses and his sister, Miriam, led the people in songs of praise to God for the deliverance He had provided from the Egyptian army (see Ex. 15:1-21), Moses led the people toward the east into the **Wilderness of Shur**. The Wilderness of Shur is a desert region located in what is today the northeastern part of Egypt in the Sinai Peninsula and stretches to the east as far as the Negev in Israel. The typical terrain is rocky and barren though enough springs and oases exist for travelers and nomads. The Israelites were probably headed south along a caravan route toward Mount Sinai.

The Israelites had traveled for three days in the wilderness without finding any sources of water. Finding water to supply such a large group would have been problematic to begin with, but to make matters worse they had not found any water at all. They finally came upon a oasis; but when they tasted the water, they found that it was too bitter to drink. The oasis itself was named **Marah**, which means “bitter.”

[Verse 24] The people began to complain to their leader, Moses. Remember that this is the same group of people who had witnessed firsthand God’s judgment on the Egyptians through the ten plagues and then were given their freedom by Pharaoh after the tenth plague. These are the same people who only days before had trusted God enough to walk through the Red Sea between two huge walls of water and then seen the dead bodies of their enemies on the shore after the opening in the sea had closed. If any group ever had reason to trust beyond question the providential care of the one true God they knew as Yahweh, it was the Israelites. But when they grew desperate for water, how did they respond? They **grumbled**, asking Moses, “**What are we going to drink?**” Instead of remembering the powerful ways God had provided for them, they thought only about their immediate need for water. Instead of relying on the constant presence of their faithful, awesome God, they complained to the one who had led them to freedom. Though their complaint was directed at Moses, in reality they were also complaining to the One who had called Moses as their leader: they were grumbling against God. Sadly, this pattern continued throughout Israel’s journey through the wilderness. (See Ex. 16:1-2; 17:1-2; Num. 14:1-4; 16:41; and Josh. 9:16-18.)

While the need for water was a legitimate concern, the real issue for the Israelites wasn’t a lack of water but lack of trust. They had enough knowledge. They had seen what God could do. They weren’t relying on stories handed down from past generations. They had been there and experienced God’s deliverance and mercy for themselves. Despite what they knew firsthand, despite all the logical reasons they had to keep trusting, they refused.

Exodus 15:25-27 Commentary

[Verses 25-26] Faced with this crisis, Moses **cried out to the LORD**. He laid out their need before God. Despite the people's grumbling, God responded to Moses' call for help. God immediately answered with a strange command: He showed Moses a nearby tree and told him to throw it into the water. Moses didn't complain or question but simply obeyed. Moses acted in faith without knowing the how or why behind God's command. Instantly, the water was no longer bitter and became fit for drinking.

God had **tested** the Israelites at Marah. Sadly, they had failed this test when they stopped trusting and started complaining. But because of His faithful love, God had answered Moses' plea by providing the needed water.

After God satisfied the people's need for water, He **made a statute and ordinance** for the Israelites. The use of the two terms does not point to two separate commands, but rather is a Hebrew literary device whereby repetition is used to emphasize a single concept. The overall framework for this one command was God's requirement that the Israelites were to **carefully obey** Him. Specifically, they were to do what He said was **right in his sight**, to **pay attention to his commands**, and to **keep all his statutes**. At this point in Israel's history, God had not yet made a formal covenant with the Israelites. That would happen later at Mount Sinai, where God would give the Israelites the Ten Commandments. What God did at this time was to establish the general basis for maintaining the relationship He had established with the Israelites. God required their complete loyalty and obedience. If they would trust and obey Him and follow Moses' direction, then God would not punish them by afflicting them with the kinds of **illnesses** which He had sent on the Egyptians. When God gave the Israelites the entire Law at Sinai, He spelled out the many ways He would bless them for their trust and faithful obedience. (See Deut. 28:1-14.) However, God also identified a long list of judgments that He would send upon them if they were unfaithful and disobedient. (See vv. 15-68.) This list contains various illnesses including "the boils of Egypt" (v. 27), a reminder of His promise in Exodus 15:26.

God then concluded His instruction with another revelation about His divine nature. He is **the LORD who heals** (*Yahweh Rophe*). The Hebrew word for *heals* is found over fifty times in the Old Testament. Often it refers to physical healing (see Gen. 20:17; Lev. 13:18); but, it is also used in the sense of to forgive (see 2 Chron. 30:20), to restore (see 7:14), or to repair. (See 1 Kings 18:30.) All of these meanings can be found in relation to God's merciful intervention as *Yahweh Rophe*.

[Verse 27] The Lord demonstrated that He is indeed "the LORD who heals." While the exact location of Elim is not known, the term means "trees." The name was appropriate, as Elim had seventy date palm trees as well as twelve springs of water. Whereas at Marah they had initially lacked even the essentials (drinkable water), at Elim the Lord provided for the Israelites an abundance!

