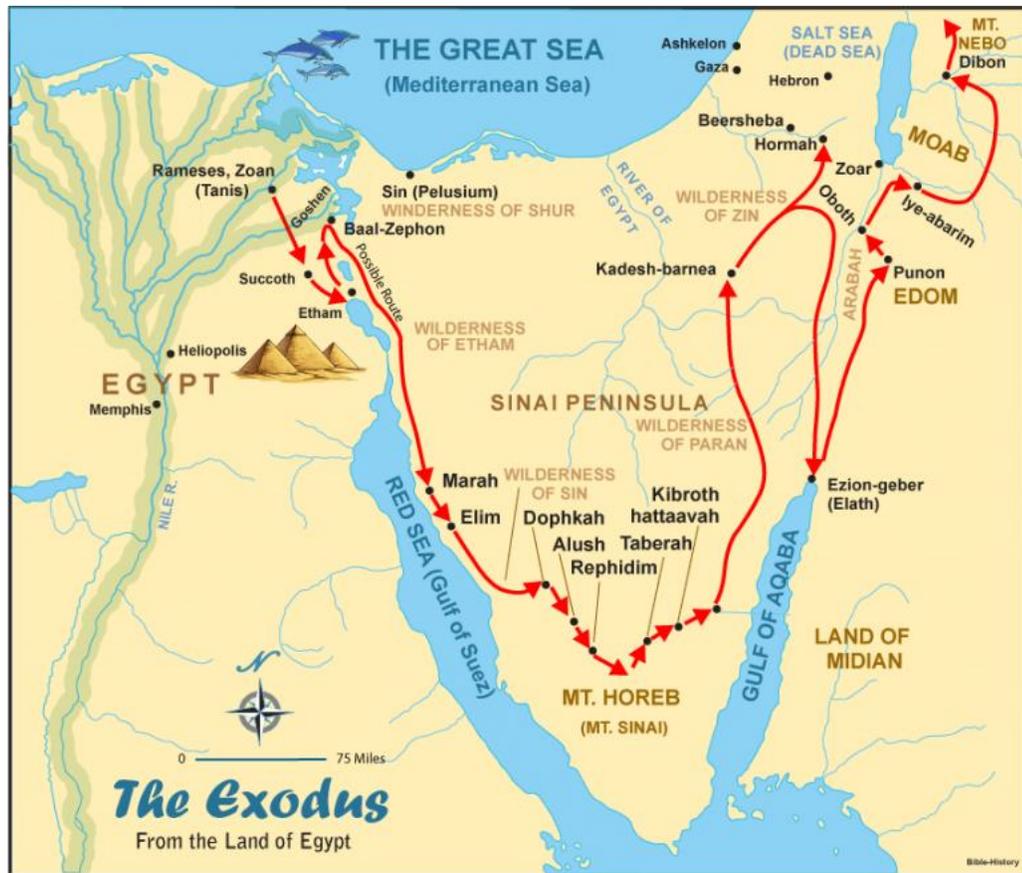


#115
May 3rd, 2020
“Are We Missing Water?”
Exodus: 17:1-7

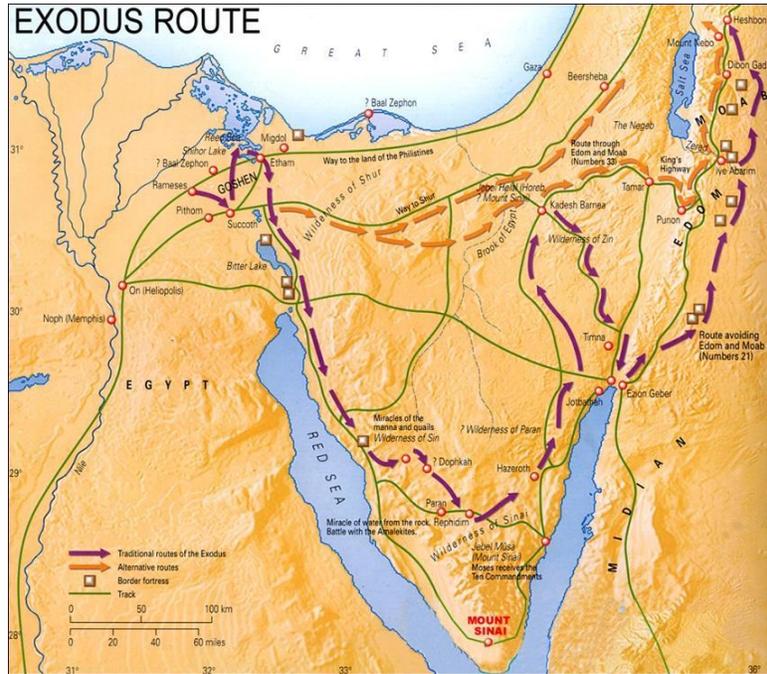
Let me begin with an apology. Last week I made reference to two maps which did not appear because I had failed to provide the maps to the I.T. persons. You should have seen my face when I realized what happened. Sometimes it is good to eat humble pie. I thank you for your gracious understanding.

The first map shows the route that Israelites took. It took them 40 years. The southern-most part of the journey was Mt. Sinai where God gave the 10



commandments.

This second map shows the route they took plus the possible route they could have traveled in 11 days. Like the people of Israel, we find ourselves in a situation we do not like. The Pre-COVID days look better and better to us. We face an uncertain future. The present time is miserable. They obediently followed the cloud by the day the pillar of fire by night yet they constantly ended up with unsolvable problems. No



wonder the past looked so good.

Complaining can get you into a lot of trouble. A few years ago Readers Digest told about a man who walked into a bank with a gun and demanded \$20,000. The teller gave him the money in a bag and he walked out. When he got home he counted the money and realized it was less than what he asked for so he went back to the bank to complain. The police arrested him.

Last week we learned that the children of Israel complained that they were hungry and God provided Manna six days a week for 40 years. They griped about wanting meat so God gave an abundance for quail. Remember, we are talking about feeding 2 million people in a desert with very little vegetation.

God's grace is so amazing. We grumble and murmur and God keeps providing for us and blessing us anyway.

In today's Scripture lesson they moved to Rephidim and set up camp. Rephidim means "place of rest." It was not a very restful place because there was no water to drink.

This is neither the first nor the last time the Israelites lacked water. They had been in the wilderness for three days when they arrived at Marah. They found the water there was undrinkable because it was bitter.

After the people complained, Moses called out to God and God provided a piece of wood, which, when thrown into the water, made it sweet and drinkable (Exodus 15:22-25a).

Near the end of the 40-year trek they, once again, were without water. (Numbers 20)

They have manna and meat, but no water. How can it be that God would lead to a place of no water? How can God provide bread and meat, but "forget" they needed water? What about us? Do you and I ask why God brought me here? In the past, in the other place at least I had this or that...but now...in this place I do not have the most basic necessity for life.

Max Lucado wrote: "God had resources they knew nothing about, solutions outside their reality, provisions outside their possibility. They saw the scorched earth; God saw heaven's breadbasket. They saw dry land; God saw a covey of quail behind every bush. They saw problems; God saw provision." I would add that they saw only rocks and God saw a river of life.

How can Israelites see the manna and quail come from the sky and doubt that God will provide water? Why do we have to experience thirst? Why are there times of testing?

Thirst is a very serious problem. It is a matter of survival. One hundred hours is the oft-cited statistic for how long a human body can typically survive at "average" temperatures without access to water. Today's Sinai Peninsula averages 82° Fahrenheit in May and 91°F in June with an average high from 95°F and 104°F respectively. The scientist, Claude Piantadosi wrote: "At 90°F survival time with limited activity easily can be decreased by a factor of two." So now we are talking about 50 hours of being able to survive.

He goes on to say that exertion such as walking a long distance, carrying one's belongings, tents and children and wrangling livestock along the way can shorten the timeline down to 7 hours.

Every summer people suffer from heat stroke which is basically dehydration. Some die. Last summer, when it was so hot, all the news networks were carrying headline stories about UPS drivers who were suffering and dying because of thirst.

We get impatient if we do not have electricity for a day or two. We call the power company to urge them to hurry up. Has your car ever broken down? It usually is at the most inconvenient time. We get annoyed if we realize that we do not have milk when we need it. These are little things compared to the necessity of water. Without it you will die.

One of the last words of Jesus on the cross, as his life ebbed away, was the cry, "I thirst." Was it thirst for physical water or to feel the presence of God in that most horrible time?

The people had a desperate need. They argued with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Does Moses have water? No, Moses does not have water, but isn't it so much easier to complain, blame, make demands and even threaten. After all, Moses was God's chosen leader.

The people sinned in at least five ways. First, they were demanding from a human being what only God could provide. Second, they failed to pray to God. They were not making humble petitions but arrogant ultimatums. Number 4 is the false accusations that Moses led them into the wilderness to kill them all and their livestock with thirst. Fifth, they refused to believe that the problem could be solved. Hebrews chapter 3 calls this the evil heart of unbelief.

Moses did what the people should have done; he laid the situation before God in prayer.

Moses said to them, "Why are you arguing with me? Why are you testing the Lord?"

The Israelites were in a very real danger of dying. They were very thirsty!

Moses' life is in a danger. Listen what he says to God: "What should I do with this people? They are getting ready to stone me." With one word Moses shows his frustration. He does not call them my people or God's people. He calls them this people.

It is not surprising the people want to stone him. When we face critical situations something opens in us to show who we truly are. When we face desperate physical needs it cracks who we truly are. Our souls react just the way we are. I am even afraid to think how I would have responded?

Desert heat, no water and lots of stones: The people are ready to use these stones to kill Moses. In their anger, they did not stop to think how illogical this was. It

would not solve the problem. How would they even get to the next campsite? Would they go back and apologize to Pharaoh if they made it back?

What would you do? Would you be open to expect God to provide? How long will you wait until He provides? Would you expect God to use a rock to provide water? No, we use rocks to stone people. Do we realize what kind of God we serve? Do we have a willingness to put faith in a God who seems not to do things in the way we expect?

Just imagine the picture if somebody in that crowd would say: "Maybe we should go and look for rocks. I think water might come from a rock." You would stone that person, too, for such a stupid idea. We all know that rocks cannot provide water.

Are we open for God to use rocks to provide water?

Water doesn't come out of rocks. That is what we know and have experienced. The same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is your God and my God. He is a God of life. God brings life in the desert and causes a river of life to flow out of a rock.

If you are dying from thirst and God says, "Take some friends and go pound a stick on a stone and you will produce water.", would you be willing to do it?

God uses people who trust Him, who dare to believe the unbelievable, who are willing to travel through the wilderness and trust that God will provide.

We carry the idea that if you have been delivered from sin, then life will be all happiness. We find that this is not true. We are freed only to find out that problems follow us everywhere and life is still difficult. Maybe we should consider the fireflies on a summer night. All we see is darkness. Every once in while we see a flash of light and then darkness resumes. As we struggle through COVID, news of cancer, divorce, sickness, financial difficulties, rebellious children and countless frustrations, it all looks dark. Then we see a quick glimpse of the glory of God and are reminded that God is indeed with us in the midst of our troubles. Faith keeps its eyes open and focused and watching for the miracles of grace that punch holes of light and hope into the darkness.

The people of Israel asked the question which haunts us all from time to time. "Is the Lord really with us or not?"

As I am adjusting to the new normal of life I ask many questions. Who am I in these days? Am I still a pastor? I cannot see people, cannot guide, cannot be a shepherd? What is the church? Who is the church? Am I a church? A disciple? Am I thirsty for the river of life Christ offers?

The wilderness is not simply a place. It is a state of mind. Like Israel, we are in a wilderness of an uncertain future. We are frustrated and feel that our basic needs are not being met. Yes, the wilderness is a state of mind. We do not know which way to

turn. Contemplate of your own state of mind. Are you in the wilderness? You might have meat and bread to eat, but do you thirst? I hope you do.

Jesus said, "Blessed – happy – are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness they will be filled." Yes, thirst is a gift. You might think how crazy! Who wants to be thirsty? Only in thirst will you look for water. Maybe in this time of COVID we need to reevaluate our needs. Even if you think you have all you need, do you have living water?

We remember Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well. He told her that if she knew who was speaking to her she would be asking him for the living water which quenches thirst forever. "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life."

In I Corinthians 10:4 we read that the people of Israel drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

Moses called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites argued with and tested the Lord. How interesting that the place was not called by the miracle God provided but by how people complained and even questioned God's presence.

You would think that the Hebrews would have preferred to sweep this whole embarrassing incident under the carpet. Instead, it was included in, not one, but five of their hymns. In Psalms 78, 81, 95, 105 and 106 they sing about their failure and about the grace of God and the refreshing water.

One day Jesus attended the festival called the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. On the last and greatest day of the festival the Jews remembered and celebrated the gift of water in the wilderness. The throngs of people would gather at the foot of Mt. Zion where the Gihon Spring flows into the Pool of Siloam. The priest would dip a golden pitcher into the water and everyone would march up to the temple singing Psalms and waving palm branches.

Once they reached the summit everyone became quiet as the priest poured the water out onto the ground. Jesus broke the silence by shouting in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." (John 7:37-38)

Did you catch that? Not only is Jesus the source of life giving water. The Holy Spirit empowers all followers of Jesus to be a source of living water.

In the last chapter of the last book of the Bible we are told there is a river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

As Isaiah said so long ago, "Ho! Come everyone who is thirsty! Come to the waters!" With joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation.