**MARAH: BITTER WATERS**

Sunday School Lesson 4

*Wandering in the Wilderness*

Exodus 15

1/26/2025

**Lesson Review:** In our previous lesson, we looked at Israel’s celebration over the defeat of Egypt. Specifically, we observed their song by the sea. The key application for us is that we need to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ our song as we go through the wilderness. Let’s review some other truths from the lesson. 1. The song of the sea was the first real moment of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from Israel to God. The song came as a natural, heartfelt \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from the children of Israel. Their victory over Egypt had given them something \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to sing about. 2. The song of the sea was totally focused on the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of God. Israel acknowledged and boldly \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the greatness of God. They also recognized that there was no who could \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to God. 3. The song of the sea was a song that the whole \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ joined in on. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of Israel took time to express their gladness in what the Lord had done. There were \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ individuals who led the way in singing this song to God. 4. The song of the sea was a song that Israel needed to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ with them. Israel sang with great \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in God’s ability to bring them into the Promised Land. Unfortunately, the song they sang did not even \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the next trial of their faith. For our lesson this morning, we are going to be looking at this next trial. It took place in Marah, and it involved some bitter waters. Israel’s first three days in the wilderness did not go well. They were thirsty, and all they had was Marah waters:

1. **BEFORE ISRAEL REACHED MARAH, THEY WERE ALREADY DEALING WITH DIFFICULTIES.**
2. **Notice that they had gone three days without finding any water. They immediately felt the extreme conditions of the wilderness.** *Exodus 15:22 So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. Jeremiah 2:6 Neither said they, Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt?* The Israelites did not have to wait very long to experience the struggles of the wilderness. They were greeted in the wilderness with three days of traveling without finding any water. There was a reason that this area was uninhabited. Nobody wanted to live there; they didn’t even want to travel through it. That’s what the wildernesses of life look like. They are hard places where nobody wants to travel. Oftentimes, the effects of the wilderness are felt very quickly by the wanderer.
3. **Notice that they did not complain along this three-day journey because their hopefulness and trust in the Lord sustained them through the difficulties.** *Exodus 15:21 And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. Psalm 63:1 O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;* While the effects of the wilderness would have been felt quickly, we do not see Israel immediately complaining to the Lord. Remember that they started off day one with singing to the Lord. They were too busy worshipping and praising God to pay much attention to their lack of water. This doesn’t mean that they didn’t notice the need, but their hope and trust in God helped them to overcome any anxiety about it. The beginning of a wilderness trial is usually not the hardest part. In this part of it, we are often still embracing the goodness and blessings of God. This proves that we can find contentment even in the midst of a dearth.
4. **Notice that they likely knew water would be a problem from the start, but the journey to Marah brought this issue to a breaking point for them.** *Exodus 12:37 And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. 38 And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle…39b because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual.* The Bible tells us that there were 600,000 men of Israel who came out of Egypt. This doesn’t count the women and children! Some people struggle to believe that there were really this many people coming out of Egypt. Logistically, there were going to be some real problems on their wilderness journey. Where would they get water in the wilderness to give drink to this many people and animals? They probably brought some water with them, but it wasn’t sufficient.
5. **MARAH TESTED ISRAEL BECAUSE IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THEIR ANSWER TO PRAYER.**
6. **Notice that Marah provided Israel with the water they needed, but they couldn’t drink it.** *Exodus 15:23 And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah.* We don’t really know when Israel ran out of water, but by the time they came to Marah, it was obvious that they were thirsty and without any water to drink. They had traveled for three days without finding any, and whatever supplies they brought had been exhausted. Imagine being terribly thirsty and coming to an oasis in the desert. For those at the front of the line, they probably started walking faster when they saw the waters of Marah. It was their answer to prayer! It was their respite in the wilderness. We don’t know if they tried the water first or just knew that it was bitter from the look of it. Either way, it was probably very unsettling to realize that their excitement and feeling of relief was for nothing. They were still thirsty!
7. **Notice that the bitterness of the waters caused Israel to acknowledge and confront their need.** *Exodus 15:24 And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?* As mentioned, the people had focused their attention on praising God and had given little attention to their needs. That changed when they saw the waters of Marah. They were confronted with their need. The realization of the situation hit them very hard, and it provided them with a test of how they would respond. It was the situation at the Red Sea all over again. Their backs were against the wall again. The enemy this time was their thirst. Why would God lead them across the Red Sea and bring them to waters that were bitter? Why did everything have to be so difficult? This had to be some of the questions running through the minds of the people there in Marah. They were frustrated.
8. **MARAH WAS GOD’S LESSON TO HIS PEOPLE THAT THE WATERS OF THIS LIFE ARE BITTER.**
9. **Notice that the Lord proved Israel at Marah. He showed them the bitterness of living without the provisional hand of the Lord.** *Exodus 15:26 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.* The Lord proved Israel (vs. 25b) there at Marah. He wanted them to understand that they did not deserve any special provisional care above Egypt. They only received it because they trusted the Lord. If they went away from God, they could expect the same bitter waters that Egypt had to deal with.
10. **Notice that the Lord used a tree to turn the bitter waters into sweet waters.** *Exodus 15:25a And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet:* *Isaiah 41:17 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.* What beautiful picture we have here of the Gospel of Jesus Christ! The bitter waters of this life are not sufficient to give us life. There is One Who has living water. In fact, He is the living Water. Through His sacrifice on the tree of Calvary, He has made the bitter waters of this world to be sweet. The Christian can enjoy the wilderness of this life because of that tree!
11. **AFTER ISRAEL LEFT MARAH, THEY REALIZED THAT GOD OFTEN HAS AN ELIM CLOSE BY.**
12. **Notice that Israel’s time in Marah was only briefly mentioned; thus, they likely weren’t there for very long.** *Exodus 15:27a And they came to Elim, Numbers 33:9a And they removed from Marah, and came unto Elim:* As we noted above, Marah was a testing ground for Israel. It was not meant to be a long-term place of refuge for them. Once the test was complete, there wasn’t much reason to stay there. They made sure that all of Israel had an opportunity to drink of the sweet waters, and then they likely departed to the next place of rest. The Lord brings about times of quick testing in our lives. The taste of these tests can be very bitter, but we must remember that they rarely last for very long. In the grand scheme of their wilderness journey, Marah was small.
13. **Notice that Elim was the place that they were hoping Marah would be, and it was only a day’s journey away.** *Exodus 15:27 And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.* Can you imagine how Israel felt when they arrived at Elim? By all estimates, it was not a far journey at all from Marah. When they arrived, they were greeted with twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees. This was a beautiful oasis in the desert. Israel encamped there in Elim. They likely spent several days there gaining strength and storing up water for the journey ahead. It is typical to find an Elim-like place in our lives after going through a bitter situation. We are reminded to keep going forward.