

REAL PEOPLE, REAL GOD:

Moses After Hollywood

What happened to Moses after the Hollywood stories of DeMille's *Ten Commandments* and DreamWorks' *Prince of Egypt*? After God's deliverer leads Israel across the Red Sea, how long does it take to get to Mt. Sinai? What route do they take? We aren't as familiar with that part of Israel's history. So let's explore Israel's early wandering—and God's first steps toward relationship with His people.

Exodus 15:22-27 – God's First Law

What are the REAL PEOPLE doing?

- They wander in the Wilderness of Shur for 3 days – without finding water.
- Come to Marah (an oasis in wilderness) but find the water isn't fit to drink.
- Grumble against Moses (like they did at the Red Sea).

My English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible explained their reason for grumbling like this:

“They do not yet trust the Lord's presence with them is sufficient for their protection and provision.”

As we progress through this week's study, we'll see this common theme. Israel (and we) grumble because they (we) don't yet trust God's presence as sufficient for protection and provision.

How does our REAL GOD respond to grumbling?

God shows Moses a piece of wood (log) to throw into water to make it potable, and then gives them His first-ever “rule” or “Law” at Marah:

“If you will diligently listen to the voice of the **LORD** your God, and do that which is right in His eyes, and give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the **LORD**, your Healer.” **Exodus 15:26** (emphasis added)

Remember, LORD – all CAPS – means *Yahweh*, and the definition of his Name is, “My nature will become evident from my actions.” *Yahweh healed* the water (action) and then issued the

first Law (another action) with a promise (a future action): Obey, and you will not become sick with the illnesses of Egypt.

- Stop for a moment and think about the nature of this God that the Israelites have seen through the above-mentioned actions: Healing their water, issuing His first law, and offering them His vow.

In the very next verse, Israel travels to Elim, where they find twelve springs of water and 70 palms (for shade from the desert sun), where they camp and enjoy a desert paradise. How about that for God's action? What did they learn about His nature from that lavish gift?

Exodus 16:1-36 – The Manna Principle

When the REAL PEOPLE Leave Elim...

We don't know how long they wandered from Elim, but Israel arrives at the Wilderness of Sin (aptly named) 2 mos + 15 days after leaving Egypt, and now the WHOLE assembly grumbles against BOTH Moses and Aaron:

“Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in Egypt—where we sat by meat pots and ate bread til we were full...” **Exodus 16:3**

This would be an example of selective memory...maybe revisionist history. How often do we aggrandize the past, while comparing it to the hardships of the present?

Our REAL GOD Gives Pre-10-Commandment Law!

God hears the grumbling and says to Moses, “I am about to rain bread from heaven...” — But it's not at all what the Israelites expect!

“...In the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. **When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground** appeared on the desert floor...Moses said to them, **‘It is the bread** the Lord has given you to eat.’” **Exodus 16:13-15 (emphasis added)**

BTW, Israelites name the bread, “What is it?” (Hebrew word = *Manna*). Then God gives specific parameters to the people for gathering it. **Why?**

“In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.”
Exodus 16:4

They were to gather a day's portion every day, and on the 6th day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much (no matter how much they gather). Cool, huh? God also promises meat at twilight (quail) with the bread that will come the next morning. **Why?**

“Then you shall know that I am the LORD **your** God.” **Exodus 16:12**

Not only does Yahweh reveal His nature through His actions, but He will also prove His determination to *belong* to Israel. Our REAL GOD isn't a distant deity. He's an intimate Creator determined to be involved in daily life.

So the quail come at twilight. The dew comes in the morning and leaves flakes on the ground. And the people begin to gather...

“The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And **when they measured it** by the omer, **the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little**. Everyone had gathered **just as much as they needed.**” **Exodus 16:16-18 (emphasis added)**

No matter how much each person gathered, God gave them perfect portion control (no Weight Watchers' scale needed!). A miracle within a miracle—that's the nature of their God that is becoming evident.

Did the REAL PEOPLE obey God's early parameters?

Um...no. Remember when God said He was testing the people to see if they would follow His instructions? News flash: God already knew they'd disobey. It was Moses who needed to see the rowdy bunch he was destined to lead for years...

“Then Moses said to them, ‘No one is to keep any of it until morning.’ However, **some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning**, but it was **full of maggots and began to smell**. So **Moses was angry** with them.” **Exodus 16:19-20 (emphasis added)**

- Relationships are hard.
- Leadership is hard.
- Following a leader is hard.

Let's face it. People are messy. We're all prone to disobedience and strong-willed resistance to authority on some issue. You may be super chill about politics but VERY opinionated when it comes to raising your kids. Maybe you don't care what's for supper, but you care deeply about which car you'll buy. We all have about a million opinions, and if you put us all in a single group—do you want to *lead* a group of people like that? I don't!

And following isn't easy either. It's tough to follow even a good leader when I must trust his/her relationship with God in eternal or life/death decisions. Relationships—whether leading or following—are just plain hard. Imagine tent camping in the wilderness with over a million people—for forty years. Eeee-gad! 😞

Exodus 17:1-4 – The Israelites Quarrel and Fight

These REAL PEOPLE Squabble!

Our Israelites move through the Wilderness of Sin (appropriate, eh?) and camp at Rephidim—and again, there's no water. This time, Scripture tells us, the PEOPLE “test” the Lord by saying:

“Is the LORD among us or not?” **Exodus 17:7**

They're asking basically, “Why do we EVER have to be thirsty IF GOD is with us?” You might have heard people around you asking similar questions:

- “Why do I ever have to go through hard stuff IF I'm a Christian?”
- “IF there is a God, why is there suffering in the world?”
- “IF He is a loving God, why did that little boy die of cancer?”

The Israelites are tired of the same “old” problem. They're thirsty...AGAIN. Have you ever been tired of the same old struggle? Finances. Health issues. Marital problems. Family division. Do you cry out with the Israelites, “How many times do we have to be thirsty?”

Here's an interesting question...Might our REAL GOD ask the Israelites—and us, “How many times must I prove power to provide before you'll believe?”

Why Might Our REAL GOD Allow Repetition?

At Rephidim, God told Moses to gather Israel's leaders and take the SAME wooden staff he'd used to turn the Nile to blood (to harm) and use it for their salvation. **Why?**

Because our REAL GOD used the same tools—both man and wooden staff—for different purposes to show it's not the about the tool. It's about the God whose power works through it.

The Israelites needed to feel the absolute certainty of their God's power—in a familiar “miracle”—before they encountered a new test.

REAL PEOPLE Get a New Test!

Not long after God miraculously provides water to drink, the Amalekites attack Israel while they're encamped at Rephidim. Remember, the Israelites are in a desert. Water equals treasure. Amalek is the resident nation, and Israel is encroaching on THEIR land and water supply. The Amalekites are fighting in familiar territory for their families. They have the advantage.

But Israel has Yahweh. And they now trust Moses to appoint a secondary leader—Joshua.

“Moses said to **Joshua**, ‘Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.’”

Exodus 17:9 (emphasis added)

As the elder leaders of Israel, Moses, Aaron, and Hur realized they wouldn't be as effective with a sword in their hands as they would be with a prayer on their lips. So they climbed to the top of a hill in plain sight of those fighting in the trenches. Each knew their role and fought to exhaustion.

Our REAL GOD Prevails!

When Moses holds up his hands—or Aaron and Hur assist him in holding them up—God sways the battle for the Israelites. The Amalekites are defeated, and God makes a special promise to a young man:

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.’” **Exodus 17:14**

Joshua, who has no idea that he'll lead the Israelites after Moses' death, will surely remember his first battle victory for the rest of his life. What a sweet gift from the God who reveals His nature through His actions.

The REAL PEOPLE Respond to God's Blessing

The Israelites built an altar and called the ALTAR, “The Lord is my Banner” (*not* a new name for Yahweh). It's a memorial, a way to commemorate His faithfulness at a crucial crossroads in their early journey with Him.

What practical ways can you “build an altar” to the Lord at crucial crossroads in your life and relationship with God? What mementos or special reminders can you create to commemorate an important step in an ever-deepening intimacy with your REAL GOD? Take some time now to think about it and take that step.

Today's Question:

- What action can you take today to commemorate a time when God revealed Himself to you in a new way?

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