



This Sunday's passage – Exodus 15v22-17v16 – felt like a far cry from the joy and jubilation of Israel's song last week. In just a few sentences we've moved from praise (15v21) to complaint (15v24). But before we judge these Israelites too quickly, we must remember that we too are prone to complaining about God and the circumstances in which he's placed us.

But the writer of Exodus focussed not upon Israel's grumbling but on God's response, in recording these 4 cycles of repeating events (1. problem, 2 complaint, 3. provision):

1. **God graciously provides for his people to show that he is their God.**

Where we might have responded in anger, God responds to their complaint in 16v2-3 with great gracious, promising to “rain down bread from heaven” (v4).

God's provision was plentiful, abundant in its amount (eg. he provided not just the purified waters of Marah, 15v25, but also the 12 springs of Elim, v27), its longevity (manna was to be his ongoing provision for 40 years, 16v35), or its totality (think how dearly they must have clung to God's promise that the Amalekites would not wipe them out in 17v14).

God's provision was personal, he wanted to show them he was the Lord their God (16v11-12). He did not just give them what they needed; he showed them his glory (16v10) and come and stood with them at Horeb (17v6).

And we as Christians know God's provision even more plentifully and personally, for we have God's own Son sent down from heaven - Jesus the “bread of life” (cf. John 6). Just as their ‘vital ingredient for life’ was bread, so ours (and not just for physical but for eternal life) is Christ. We have everything we need and could need in him.

2. **God lovingly tests his people to see whether they will trust that he is their God.**

Straight after the miracle in 15v25 and the promise in 16v4, God announces that he will test his people. There will be a Sabbath test – each day of the week they must take only that day's amount of food, but the day before the Sabbath they must take double, but it will not go off, it will still be fresh on the Sabbath.

God is not here asking them to earn their salvation (that has already been granted, and the power was very evidently his not theirs'!) or somehow prove they deserved it. Nor is he tempting them to sin. Rather, God is giving his people an opportunity to display their trust in him, to show that they really will live by and believe his word, and to know the blessing that comes from that.

But this testing may sit uncomfortably as we remember “faith and faith alone”. Perhaps we have too cerebral a view of faith, especially living in a culture where most of us do not feel that we have to depend upon God for food or freedom from suffering and oppression each day. There is a challenge here, perhaps, to remember that even in the privileged West we are reliant upon God for everything, not least our daily bread, and that faith is not simply what we *think*, it is our day-by-day *willingness to trust* and base our lives upon God and his word.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. Can you sympathise with the Israelites' complaints? What circumstances tend to lead you to grumble against God?
2. How does God show his gracious care and abundant love for his people through these wilderness miracles?
3. What does it mean that Christ is “the bread of life”? How is he our manna? What does that mean for our daily lives? What difference does it make?
4. What do we risk by defining faith in terms of ‘belief’ rather than ‘trust’?
5. Have you had any experience of God ‘testing’ your trust of him? What impact did it have upon you? How can we endure such testing?
6. What do you tend to trust in instead of/as well as God? How can we learn and help one another to day-by-day put our trust in God?