

5-3-20, THE ROAD TO ELIM
Exodus 15: 22-27

Today's scripture describes the procedure in which the people of Israel migrated from Marah to Elim. Upon obtaining bitter water in Marah, they started blaming the leader that God had chosen, Moses. It was then that Moses prayed to God, turning the bitter water into sweet water.

Afterwards, people of Israel went to Elim and it was like paradise. The word 'Elim' means 'place of trees,' and it served as a paradise, an oasis, to those who traversed the desert.

Elim had 12 sources of water, so the 12 tribes of Israel never had to fight for water. In Elim, there also stood 70 palm trees, each symbolizing the 70 elders of Israel in Exodus 24: 9, which provided comforting shade to the people of Israel. To the tired and weary traveler of the desert, Elim was indeed an oasis, a paradise!

Some theologians said spring water of Elim symbolizes salvation. The palm trees symbolize blessing. Elim itself symbolizes health. To all Christians, the road to Elim is a road of salvation, a path to blessing, a trail for longevity and health. I hope that every one of us here today can go to Elim in our difficult times spiritually and physically!

Then what must we do to get to Elim? We must pass through Marah. The people of Israel went through Marah in order to get to Elim. Likewise, when we, as Christians, can safely pass through the spiritual path traversing through Marah, we can safely arrive at the spiritual world of Elim.

What does passing through Marah signify? Simply put, it means to experience God as a healer. We must trust in God, who treated the bitter water of Marah into sweet water and repaired and restored the exhausted bodies of humans, just like our coronavirus pandemic.

Take a look at the last part of verse 26 of today's scripture. **"For I am the Lord who heals you."** This is the most important passage of today's scripture. The meaning of the miracle of Marah is summed up in this one passage. The most important condition, or requirement, from diseased Marah to healthy Elim is trusting in God, believing that God is a healing God.

Now that we have focused our spiritual lesson under the topic, 'healing God,' we must think about the three steps of healing. These three steps are the same three steps required for movement from Marah to Elim.

1. Let's talk about the symptoms. We must correctly diagnose the disease—where it hurts, how it hurts.

The world of Marah is a diseased one. That is why the natural well of Marah, the source of water, was spoiled. Water is valuable only when it is drinkable. The fact that the water from Marah was bitter tells us that the water could not serve its purpose. Water was not the only thing diseased at Marah. The people were also diseased. The souls of the people of Israel were also stricken with disease.

The people of Israel were enslaved in Egypt for 430 years before being liberated. Under the grace of God, they were able to cross the Red Sea as if it was hard ground. According to Exodus 15: 1-21, after experiencing the miracle of exodus, Moses and the people of Israel chanted songs of victory. They sang the praises of the omnipotent God.

But within four days of miraculously crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel began blaming God. The same lips that sang praise and glory of God started expressing words of doubt and reproach towards the leader that God had chosen, Moses. As stated in James 3: 10, praise and curses flew out of same set of lips. The reason for the sudden complaint from the people of Israel towards Moses had to do with the water. After crossing the Red Sea, they wandered the wilderness of Shur, yet could not find water. Water is a critically precious resource in the Middle Eastern desert, where the sun is scorching and the heat stifling. How thirsty must they have been after walking for three days in the wilderness yet not being able to find water? When they arrived at a place called Marah at last, the water was bitter. The word 'Marah' means "bitter". These people after tasting bitter water, began blaming the leader that God appointed, Moses.

What does it mean to 'blame?' It tells us that they had forgotten, in mere four days, the God who performed a miracle to get them out of Egypt. They had forgotten about the great power of God, the power that had parted the Red Sea!

As described, the souls of the Israelites were diseased. Although this was their first complaint after Exodus, it points to the fact that these people will constantly and always complain at the first opportunity given. Even though they experienced the surprising miracle of God a mere four days ago, God was nowhere in their conscience. Their souls were truly diseased.

When people are infected with diseases, certain symptoms appear. Symptoms such as constant anger, incessant complaining, and lack of gratitude. It is a proof of being unconscious to the immeasurable grace of God that one has received. Do not forget that when the people of Israel complained upon receiving the bitter water of Marah, it was a symptom of a diseased soul! This is the first lesson that we must think about it when we face the coronavirus pandemic

2. **Let us talk about the Diagnosis: We must correctly diagnose the source of illness.**

A doctor's correct diagnosis of his patient is very important in treating the disease. What separates a great doctor from a bad one is the ability to correctly diagnose his patients. So many medical accidents and tragedies happen because of incorrect diagnosis! Likewise, in order to treat the spiritual disease, it is extremely important to find out the cause of the illness.

Then why were the souls of Israelites diseased? What was the reason? In short, it was due to the lack of faith. Because they were unable to believe in the benevolence and omnipotence of God, they sat in Marah complaining about the water.

The route from Egypt to Canaan is a short distance. A straight-line path would take about a week to walk. Taking a more indirect route, no matter how far around one

goes, would take less than a month. Why did God make the people of Israel wander the dangerous, unstable, and unpredictable wilderness for 40 years?

It was to train them. It was to have them realize that God is the only safe refuge. It was to temper them to trust and obey only God. It was to have them learn that God will feed them and clothe them, even when there is a severe shortage of goods.

In order to teach them completely about faith, God drove the people of Israel into the wilderness. But how did these Israelites act when drinking the bitter water of Marah? Were their actions completely bereft of faith? Because of the lack of faith, their souls were diseased and tainted.

Why do words of complaint and dissatisfaction flow out of our lips? It is because we do not trust in God. Do not forget the fact that the first reason for disease of the soul is the lack of faith! This is the second message for us in this depressed situation of Covid-19.

3. Let's talk about the Prescription: There must be a practical and concrete prescription to treat the disease.

Upon finding the cause of illness, the doctor gives a prescription. Whether it is medicine or surgery, the doctor prescribes a practical method to treat or cure the illness. The same goes for spiritual illnesses. If a correct diagnosis is given based on symptoms, the prescription must be given to address the illness.

The people of Israel showed the symptom of spiritual illness upon drinking the bitter water of Marah. They complained. Correctly diagnosing that the cause of this illness is a lack of faith, God gives a prescription to treat the illness.

According to verse 25, upon hearing Moses crying out, God points to a tree. God pointed Moses to this tree in order to turn the bitter water into sweet water. To show an example of true faith to the faithless people of Israel, Moses casts the tree into the bitter water. Moses obeyed God. When he did, the water changed. The natural water, which was bitter, was cured!

The tree mentioned here symbolizes the Cross of Christ. Wherever the Cross of Christ is placed, all spiritual bitter water will be turned into sweet water! That is why Jesus, in John 4: 14, states the following. **"But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."**

Just as Moses threw the tree to treat the bitter water, those who rely on the Cross of Christ will experience the flowing river of everlasting life!

Let's look at verse 26. **"He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD , who heals you."** God is talking about the three conditions required for the healing of the spiritual disease that the Israelites were suffering from in this bible passage.

First, we must listen to the word of our Lord, God. **Second**, we must do things that are righteous in God's eyes. **Third**, we must listen to God's commandments and obey all His decrees.

In short, God has laid out certain decrees and ordinance to keep our souls healthy; as long as we follow them, we will be completely liberated from all spiritual diseases!

I would like to conclude that the Marah was diseased just like today's current situation. It is a faithless world in awful need of treatment. Just as God treated the bitter water of Marah into sweet water, He tried to treat and cure the diseased souls of the Israelites. God had Moses demonstrate what true faith was. When God pointed to a tree, Moses threw the tree into the water without hesitating. Moses demonstrated that true faith is obedience. Healing first took place in the water! After treating the water, God revealed to us that He is a healing God, 'Jehovah Rapha.' Not only does He treat bitter water, but also declared that He treats the diseased souls of humans!

Dear God's people! Pay close attention to the fact that after this event took place, the people of Israel entered Elim. Elim was the paradise awaiting the people who were liberated from spiritual illness.

From the faithless world of Marah, chart your course towards the world of faith, Elim! If you live righteously, according to the word of God, then you will be able to have all the blessing of Elim at your disposal!

For those of us gathered here today, I pray in the name of the Lord that all of us can make the journey from Marah into Elim. Amen.

Let us pray!

Loving God, we are like Israelis traveling in the wilderness fighting against the coronavirus. In the face of Marah's bitter water, let us not complain, but pray to the Lord with gratitude, knowing our weakness and inadequacy. The Lord, who has prepared good things for us, wants to give us His blessings like the oasis of Elim, instead of the bitter water of Marah. May we always accompany the Lord and realize what He wants and what is near him, and may His words and prayers lead us to joy and peace in the journey of this desert. Let us be children of faith who know our weaknesses and depend on the Lord for everything.

We pray in the name of Jesus.