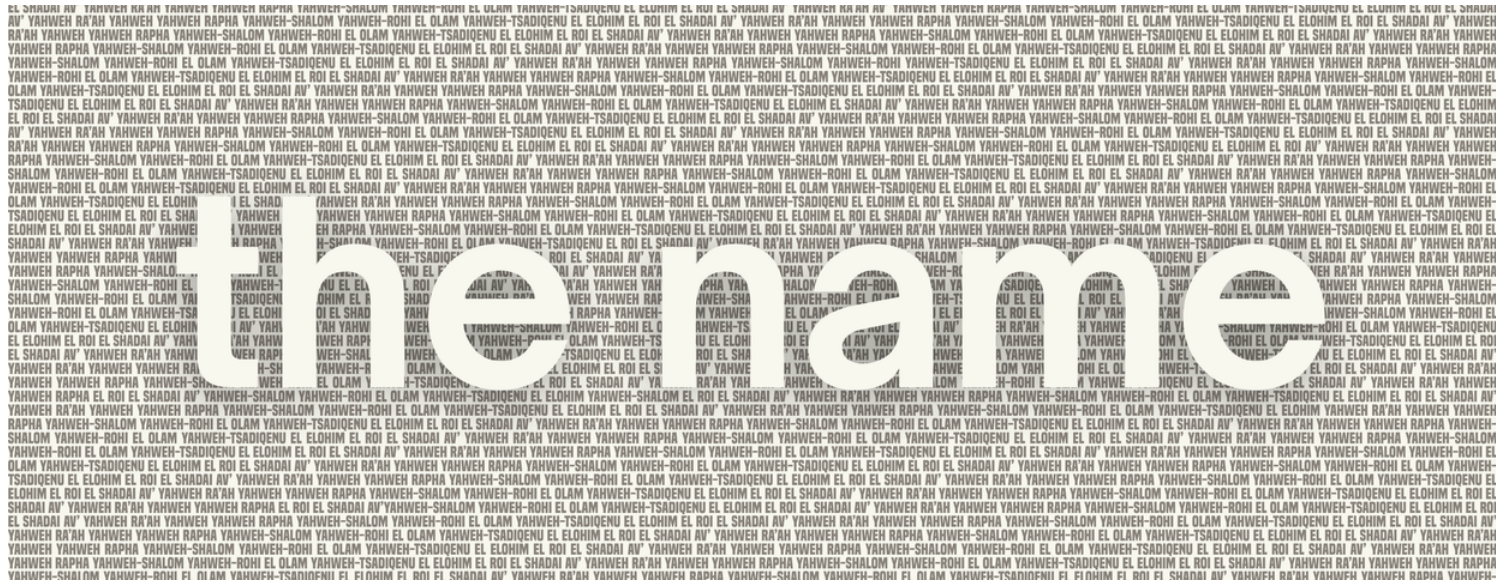




PART 6: YAHWEH RAPHA, THE LORD WHO HEALS

By Grant Del Begio

Exodus 15

God sustains us every day with his simple, eloquent creation we call water, and water is used as both life-giving necessity and a life-giving metaphor throughout scripture. And water figures greatly in the passage we're going to look at this morning to explore the Lord who heals us.

I. The Problem: Our Need for a Healer

For three days, God's newly freed people travel across the desert of Shur, literally pushing the limits of human survival. No water for three days in the desert would have left them in a very fragile physical state. But there's more fragility than that, we discover they are fragile spiritually as well.

Emotions are like a gauge that indicates what's going on inside of us. It's an indication of our spiritual health and our physical health. You can ignore the gauges on your car dash for a while, but eventually, you better check that oil, you better see why the engine is overheating. And the emotion that surfaces as they reach Mara, is bitterness and grumbling.

One might suppose that after their glorious and miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt, their confidence level and their knowledge of God's provision would've been high. No, the emotion that surfaced was bitterness, a grumbling heart.

While they were free of their bondage in Egypt, they were still in the bondage of sin, their trust had not shifted to God. As bad as things were in Egypt, there was more predictability, so bitterness grew.

It was early on in their wilderness journey, and they were not getting off on the right foot. Jeremiah chapter 2, verse 13 describes the crisis of their hearts.

‘My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.’ – Jeremiah 2:13

“A cistern is a large well or pool carved in a rock. A broken cistern has sprung a leak and can't hold water. God is saying, “If you go out there to the world and drink from that well, it is not going to satisfy you.”
Pastor Greg Laurie

We dig our own cisterns, broken cisterns, and expect them to satisfy our thirst and bring us contentment.

We drink from the broken cisterns of substance overuse, materialism, position, wealth, popularity, relationships, rules and even religiosity.

The Israelites' thirst and our restless thirst are emblematic of spiritual distrust.

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So what is to be done with God's chosen people, what is to be done with us? How can we get out of this mess?

II. The Solution: How God Wants to Heal

Do you think that God was surprised by their distress over the bitter water?

It was a test, and there would be several tests throughout their wilderness wanderings to see where their trust lies.

1. God intends to heal our distrust

The bitter, undrinkable water becomes drinkable.

The dead water becomes living water.

Perhaps the first lesson is, God saying: "You can trust me, I'll provide for you."

Commentators have debated whether the bitter water was healed supernaturally or by some natural qualities of the tree that was thrown into the water. I have already made the case that water itself is an everyday miracle. What about the tree? Biblical scholar, Christopher Wright, puts it well:

*"That a species of tree would have antiseptic or sweetening properties is natural enough, but it comes from the hand of the creator, who, having planted it, adjust the right place years earlier, now pointed out to Moses - and adjust the critical moment when the limits of endurable thirst has been reached. More likely, the narrator is delighting in the irony that, in contrast to the first plague, which had made the Egyptian water supply undrinkable, the first act of God after the Exodus is to purify the undrinkable water for Israel."*¹

2. God intends to heal our hearts that are prone to worship and elevate things that will not ultimately satisfy

Verse 25 goes on to say: "There the Lord issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test."

Verse 26 adds: "If you listen carefully to 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."

In Hebrew, the word for a medical doctor or healer is **Rofeh** (רופֵּא), which comes from the root verb **Rapha** (רָפָא), meaning "to heal", "to cure" or "to make whole." There is also a connection to the Hebrew word "to let go or relax."

God, literally wants to be our great physician, he wants to give us rest.

Yahweh Rapha is making it clear:

"If you trust me and follow me, I won't just take care of your physical needs... See how, long ago, I laid out this object lesson of the bitter water and the healing tree three days walk from the Red Sea. You were very thirsty, I had your attention, but I want to address more than your physical needs. I want to heal you from all the diseases of Egypt, of hardened, bitter hearts, and the sinful practices that you have carried with you out of your captivity in the pharaoh's kingdom. Things like pride, greed, lust, envy – the very things that tear relationships apart."

And God is inviting them into a covenant relationship with him, which will very much affect how they relate to each other. God is inviting them to rest in him.

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Again, Christopher Wright makes the important point:

“Nowhere in the book of Exodus so far has God prefaced his promises to Israel with an “if.” God’s saving grace liberated Israel simply because of God’s covenant faithfulness, compassion and justice. God’s salvation was unconditional in the sense that it was not conditioned upon anything that Israel had done or could do, other than trust God and Moses, when the time came.” -

Christopher Wright, The Story of God Bible Commentary

They face a choice with conditions and consequences. Here is the test as described in verses 25 and 26. Will they or won't they walk in obedience with their Deliverer and Healer?

Such obedience would not be a way to pay for, or earn their salvation, but a response to God's salvation.

God of course, moves them on from Mara to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, they camped near the water. Yahweh Rapha wants to give them time to rest and recharge in a beautiful place with lots of drinking water and palms for shade before they move on. God graciously meets broken people in their time of need, physically nourishes them, showing that he can be trusted.

Will the Israelites be a worshipping people who occasionally grumble? Or a grumbling people who occasionally worship? Where do we fit in that paradigm?

3. Any healing we experience is ultimately a work of God

In Psalm 103:3 David gives praise to the Lord, *“Who forgives all our sins, who heals all your diseases”*

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“Some suggest that David is speaking about spiritual illness, such as the burdens of sin. But that is not it. I think he really is speaking of diseases. He is saying that when we are healed, as we often are, it is God who has done it.

He is the healer of the body as well as of the soul. Therefore, such health as we have been given is a sure gift from God. God should be praised for it.”
(J.M. Boice, Psalms)²

But some sicknesses are prolonged and end in death. Sometimes God can ask us really hard and fundamental questions in the midst of sickness and suffering. For it is the days are not light and carefree that we find out what really matters most.

Dr. Paul Tournier writes in *A Doctor's Casebook in Light of the Bible*, that as a Christian physician:

“If I am just caring for their temporal illness and not, when opportunity presents itself, pulling them towards the gospel and a glorious eternity, I am failing to do my best. Though our earthly bodies will eventually all fail us, our heavenly imperishable bodies will not.”³

Yahweh Rapha really wanted to have a healing covenant relationship with his chosen people. He knew that this relationship could heal their thirst for unhealthy things, but first he had to save them out of the darkness and slavery of Egypt.

III. The Gospel in Exodus

There is an obvious parallel to the gospel – to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection – where we are saved by grace alone, not by works. But that grace always changes our life.

We're not saved by living a good life in any way, but when that grace grabs hold of us it changes us, transforms our life.

And it is fair to ask if we are not being changed over time, have we really embraced the gospel? Remember, questions are tests, our answers can reveal gaps. Pastor Timothy Keller liked to ask Christians, is your life different than a year ago? Are you more patient, more loving, more self-controlled?

- ¹Wright, Christopher. (2021) *The Story of God Bible Commentary: Exodus*. Zondervan.
²Boice, James Montgomery. (1 September 2005). *Psalms*. Baker Books.
³Tournier, Paul. (1 March 1976) *A Doctor's Casebook in Light of the Bible*. Harper&Row.

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