

The Story of Hope #9

What's That for?

Exodus 16-25, Deuteronomy 4-11

Story of Hope Section 16

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The crashing waters of the Red Sea have settled. The nation of Israel, about 2 million people, look on in unbelief and awe as the God who led them out of slavery just destroyed the entire Egyptian army. They are now a completely free people! As the last line of their magnificent rescue song rings out, "The Lord will reign forever and ever" (Ex. 15:18) We can imagine the promises to Abraham, so many hundreds of years before, now echo anew in their hearts and minds. They will be made a great nation, they will receive a beautiful land of promise, and they will be used by God to bless the whole earth. But they are not at that promised land yet, and God has some work to do with them before they will be ready to enter it. God is going to establish a new covenant with them, the Mosaic Covenant. It will be defined by the giving of the Law to the people. In this section we see the themes of **God, Man, Sin, Death, and Faith.**

Right at the beginning of their journey toward the promise land, God informs the people of Israel how this new relationship with Him works. We see in Genesis 15:22-26, that it only takes three days for the people to lose faith and begin grumbling. They didn't have any water to drink, so instead of asking and trusting God to provide, they "grumbled" at Moses. They are only three days removed from walking through walls of water to their rescue, then watching God throw the waters back together destroying their enemies. Yet, here they are complaining and doubting that God will provide. In this moment we see the great patience of God, as He miraculously provides water for them to drink despite their attitudes. Following this provision, God reveals how this relationship between Him and His rescued people is going to work. It is going to be founded on faith based obedience. He is going to lead, protect, and provide for everything they need, but they are going to need to believe His words and obey His commands, and if they do not believe and obey, there will be consequences. This is obviously not a new concept. It is the exact same idea we saw in the Garden with Adam and Eve. They were asked to obey one simple rule, they failed to do so, and as a result, everything broke. Man's relationship with God was broken, man's relationship with man was broken, and even man's relationship with the rest of creation was broken. As a result, there is no longer one simple rule for man to follow, but there will be hundreds of rules that govern every aspect of life, rules relating to God, to others, and the rest of creation.

God provides the water, but right after, He re-establishes His expectations and His promises with the people He rescued. Exodus 15:26 *"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."* This pattern is going to be seen over and over again as the Israelites move through the wilderness toward the promised land. They will be faced with challenges (food, water, war, disease) and they will almost always complain and grumble and doubt. God will at times get angry with them, and discipline them, but He will continue to provide for them and lead them. God leads them to a place called Mount Sinai, where He begins to formally communicate to Moses "The Law". When God finished giving the people of Israel "The Law" there were six hundred and thirteen commands. These are found throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. There are many different ways

to divide these laws up, but let's break them into two main categories: Laws to Obey; and Laws to obey once you have disobeyed the first Laws. When we break them into these two categories, it will help us understand some of the main things God wants to communicate through this part of His Story. The question that guides us, is... "why was the Law given". We have to understand some of the purposes of the Law if we are to fully understand the Story of Hope.

The Law was given to reveal a person's faith. On a very practical level, Israel's faith and belief (or lack thereof) would be revealed through their obedience to God's Law. It would be easy to say "we believe you God" if they didn't have to do anything to show their belief. But God does not work that way, nor does faith. There are many times where Israel says "we believe and we will obey", then they turn around and disobey. This reveals their lack of faith. God gives laws in order to "test" a person's faith. Not so that *He* can know if they will be faithful, He already knows that, but so that *they* can see places where their faith is lacking. This is true for us as well as the Israelites. Once we come to God in faith, He asks us to follow His Word, and our levels of obedience reveal the character of our faith.

The Law was given to reveal the separation between God and Man. Ever since the garden, man has been separated from God. The relationship was broken and needs to be repaired. When God gives the Law, He isn't doing it to REPAIR the separation, but rather to REVEAL the separation. The Law is like a mirror in that it can clearly show us where our hair is a mess, but then who takes the mirror down and tries to comb their hair with it!? No one does, because that isn't what it is for. The same is true of the Law. It was never meant to repair, and no man can hope to repair their broken relationship with God by following the Law. It reveals the need but something else must repair what has been broken. As Israel realized their inability to perfectly follow the law, it revealed to them that they were separated from God, and that something else was needed to repair that separation. The Law was inadequate for the repair.

The Law was given to reveal how the separation will be repaired. Remember our two categories: Laws to obey, and then Laws to obey once you have disobeyed the earlier laws. The second category of laws revealed how God was going to repair the separation caused by man's disobedience. It would come through sacrifice. The whole second type of laws revolved around sacrifices needed to cover the sins of the people. These sacrifices were many and often. There was even one day a year (the Day of Atonement) where the high priest would make a sacrifice for all the sins of all the people. However, the repetitive nature of these sacrifices showed their inadequacy to fully deal with the separation. They only dealt with it for a short period of time, and though they were sufficient for that time, they weren't able to fully cover the sins of the people. Not only that, they weren't a sufficient substitute either because these were animal sacrifices used to cover human sin. In order for a full and total repair of the separation, there would have to be a proper substitute and sacrifice that could cover all sins, for all people, for all time. But what or who could possibly do that? Only a sinless man could be the right substitute, needing no sacrifice for their own sin, but this sacrifice would have to be more than a man to cover such a great multitude of sins and sinners. Someone, more than a man, perfect and willing to die in place of sinners? What a rescuer that would be!