

2

OUR HEALER



When have you admired a renovation project?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

God is the only one who can restore us and make us whole.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Works of art like Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper* are universally recognized as great masterpieces, but most people don't realize the images we admire are quite different from what da Vinci first painted. *Mona Lisa* has darkened over time because of the varnishes used on it. Original fine details are now obscured. *The Last Supper* has deteriorated due to mildew. Early on, well-meaning painters attempted to clean it and repaint sections. In the process, they covered up da Vinci's actual work. Restoration is needed when we want to return to the artist's original design.

When left to themselves, objects like art, houses, and old cars lose their luster and even fall apart. And so do we. When left to ourselves, we drift from God's original plan and design for our lives. We take our eyes off Him. We often complain about Him while forgetting all He has done for us.

In short, we need restoration and healing.

In the Book of Exodus, the Israelites lost their focus, yet God showed Himself to be the God who restores. He is the Lord, our Healer.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Exodus 14:29-31

²⁹ But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

The parting of the Red Sea was an incredible miracle that sealed God's rescue of His people from their slavery in Egypt. Not surprisingly, that event holds a prime position as a symbol of God's salvation in the Old Testament. Isaiah later wrote: "Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 51:10-11).

The Israelites had seen a clear demonstration of God's great power. As a result, "the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses." When they reached the other shore, the Israelites sang a song praising God for His deliverance. (See Ex. 15:1-18.) The song not only celebrated their present victory over Pharaoh; it also looked forward to their victorious conquest and settlement of the promised land. As we'll see, however, those songs didn't last very long. In fact, the Israelites' rejoicing turned quickly to grumbling when they were confronted with the reality of their freedom from Egypt.

What was true of the Israelites is often true of us today. Indeed, we often find that a testing of our faith will follow moments of spiritual victory. The question is whether we can still sing of God's glorious holiness even when we face moments of spiritual drought.

What have you learned about God from firsthand experience?

QUESTION #2

Exodus 15:22-24

²² Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah.

²⁴ And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?”

Only a few days into the journey, the people of Israel began to grumble and complain, frustrated by the lack of water. When the Israelites saw Marah in the distance, they thought it was an oasis and likely believed their problems were solved. But their hope was dashed to pieces when they discovered the wells contained “bitter” (non-potable) water. Many artesian wells are bitter and unpleasant because of mineral salts. This one was not simply unpleasant; it may have been dangerous to their health.

The Israelites responded the way we typically do when things don’t go our way: they complained. They demanded of Moses, “What shall we drink?” How quickly a hero can become a scapegoat!

While their grumbling was aimed explicitly at Moses, it was implicitly directed at God, who had appointed Moses as their leader. Moses made this connection clear when Israel grumbled later about the lack of food: “The LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD” (Ex. 16:8). Sadly, God’s people are described as complaining over twelve times during their wilderness wanderings. The apostle Paul used the grumbling nature of the Israelites to warn believers in Corinth about such behavior, along with craving evil things, idolatry, immorality, and more. (See 1 Cor. 10:6-11.) We tend to treat grumbling, griping, and complaining as minor issues, hardly worthy of mention since “everyone does it.” Yet Paul treated grumbling as a major offense and insisted it must be avoided.



*How does
complaining impact
our connection with
God?*

QUESTION #3

The Israelites' thirst caused them to forget the deliverance they had recently enjoyed by the power of God. The contrast is striking between the faith they expressed in praise after crossing the Red Sea and the lack of faith when they encountered a challenge just three days into their journey. The matter was one of perspective. Could Israel trust God to work in every circumstance based on His character?

It's possible to grumble inwardly without verbalizing it. When we allow struggles and doubts to cause us to blame God for our circumstances, we're falling into the same pattern of behavior as the Israelites did in the wilderness. When we allow anxiety to rule our lives, we're focusing on circumstances rather than God's provision.

Exodus 15:25-27

²⁵ And he cried to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, ²⁶ saying, "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." ²⁷ Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

God once again provided for the Israelites in a miraculous way, showing that He's not only powerful to deliver His people, but can and will sustain them. In addition, God made "a statute and a rule [for them]." This statute contained a condition, "If you will diligently listen," which was followed by a promise: "I will put none. . . ." The Old Testament contains numerous examples of "if/then" covenants. They demonstrate that God's blessings flow through the obedience of His children.

What are some different ways God heals and restores His people?

QUESTION #4

In this case, God's promise was related specifically to the illnesses that had been "put on the Egyptians." Surely the Israelites would have connected God's turning of the Nile to blood (see Ex. 7:14-25) with the undrinkable water at Marah. If Israel would carefully obey the Lord, they would not find the water God provided to be bitter because He is "the LORD, your healer." This is the name *Jehovah Rapha*.

The word *Rapha* occurs about sixty times in the Old Testament; it always refers to restoring, healing, or curing. It's frequently used in relation to physical healing, but it also can relate to moral and spiritual healing. At Marah, Jehovah revealed Himself to be the only source of true wholeness. He alone has the power to change the bitter experiences of life into something sweet.

God mercifully sustained the people at Marah, but there's more to the story. God led them from Marah "to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water." The numbers seven and twelve (and multiples of those numbers) appear throughout Scripture representing completeness. Elim was a place of completeness—a refuge that pointed to the abundant and healing provision of *Jehovah Rapha*.

We should never overlook the most important way *Jehovah Rapha* heals: through Jesus Christ. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). God promises healing for your deepest pains, your disappointments, your past, and your sins. He can turn your bitterness into sweet refreshment. If you've been sidetracked at Marah, bitter in soul and spirit, the only way to travel from Marah to Elim is to turn to *Jehovah Rapha*. Jesus is our *Jehovah Rapha*—our God Who Heals!

How can our actions and attitudes demonstrate that we follow the God who heals and restores?

QUESTION #5

GOD OUR HEALER

Healing and restoration can look very different in each believer's life. Use the space below to illustrate what God's restoration has looked like in your life. You may sketch a picture, write a poem, or use words and symbols to tell your story.

What did you learn about God our Healer through these experiences?

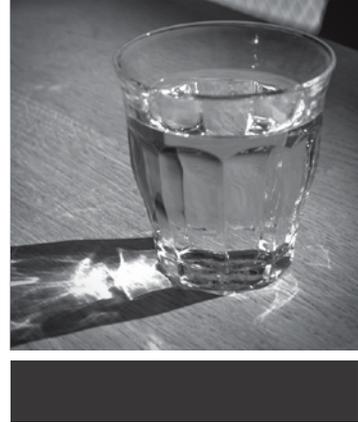
"Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me
and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise!"

—JEREMIAH 17:14

LIVE IT OUT

How should we respond when we find ourselves drinking from the bitter wells of Marah? Consider taking one of these steps this week:

- ▶ **Listen.** Listen earnestly to the voice of God. What is He trying to teach you in your present circumstances? What have you learned about God from these events? Change your perspective by seeing what God is doing on your behalf.
- ▶ **Obey.** Look to see if there are areas of disobedience in your life. Repent and turn from any disobedient actions or attitudes. Turn to the One who desires to heal you. Obedience flows from an accurate understanding of God's character.
- ▶ **Encourage.** Encourage someone you know who is drinking from bitter waters. Point them to Christ who offers healing, hope, and abundance.



You may not feel like a work of art right now, but the Bible assures each and every one of us that we've been created in God's image. If you want to move away from a place of bitterness, turn to *Jehovah Rapha*, the God Who Heals.

My thoughts