

JEHOVAH RAPHA THE LORD WHO HEALS

Exodus 15

The growth of hospitals, clinics, and counseling centers and the increased use of psychiatric drugs give us a glaring reality to the pain, hurt, sickness, and brokenness in our lives. In churches across this country, we list people's names in the bulletin each week who have asked for prayer for physical healing. Every week churches pray over those names. Isn't amazing how many people are in such dire need.

Yet what we don't put in the bulletin every week are those people who need healing in their emotions, circumstances, or relationships. They may not have a diagnosed physical ailment, but they still feel sick. If I were to tell you I was sick, your first thought would be that something was wrong with my body. But if I were to tell you I was sick and tired, you would know that I was referring to emotional or relational pain.

None of us are enjoying a perfect, pain-free life. We all need to be made well because of something that is broken in our bodies, emotions, or situations. We may need to be healed of pain from the past or grief in the present. Many people need healing from uncertainty about their future. Whatever the case, the need for healing in most people's lives is real and deep.

I know people that have gone to doctors because of some type of ailment or unrecognized symptoms, but the doctors were unable to identify the causes. As a result, these patients weren't given prescriptions for healing, and often the symptoms got worse.

The name of God we're going to look at in this chapter focuses specifically on His power to heal. That name is Jehovah Rapha, "the Lord who heals." The revelation of this strong name comes on the heels of a great miracle. The backdrop is found in the book of Exodus, where we read, "Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea" (Exodus 15:22).

Now, we know about the Red Sea. Whether we read about it in the Bible or saw Charlton Heston lift the rod of Moses and watched the waters part on our TVs, we're familiar with God's deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian army. The Israelites had found themselves caught between a rock and a wet place. Pharaoh was on one side, coming to re-enslave them, and on the

other side stood a very wet and wide body of water. The Israelites couldn't go back, and they certainly couldn't go forward. They were stuck right where they were. Yet seemingly out of nowhere, God performed a miracle. He parted the sea, dried up the ground, and allowed the Israelites to pass through to the other side. Then when the Egyptians came in after them, God closed the walls of water, and the Egyptian army drowned.

No human strategy or intervention could have gotten the Israelites out of the situation they were in. It took a miracle to pull them out of it—a miracle that every person experienced, witnessed, and benefited from personally. As might be expected, the Israelites broke out into a praise and worship service following this miraculous intervention by God. Exodus 15:1-3 gives us a glimpse into the people's hearts and emotions.

1 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and spoke, saying:

"I will sing to the Lord,

For He has triumphed gloriously!

The horse and its rider

He has thrown into the sea!

2 The Lord is my strength and song,

And He has become my salvation;

He is my God, and I will praise Him;

My father's God, and I will exalt Him.

3 The Lord is a man of war;

The Lord is His name.

The Israelites were on an emotional and spiritual high, gloriously confident in God as He had just demonstrated Himself before them. But then we read that the Israelites "went out into the wilderness of Shur" (verse 22). Having just come through water, they hit dry land—very dry land. The wilderness isn't exactly an exciting place to be, but it was the only way they could get to where God was taking them.

In other words, the only way to get from Egypt (where they had been delivered from) to Canaan (where they were being delivered to) was through the wilderness. That's a key principle in our study tonight. Often the only way to get from where you are to where you need to go is through the wilderness. Now, nobody wants to go through the wilderness, but typically there is no other way to get to Canaan. Like the Israelites, we often have to go through a dry place.

Unfortunately for the Israelites, their wilderness literally had no water. Scripture tells us they had no water for three days, and when they eventually found water, it was undrinkable. "And they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah" (verses 22-23).

The human body can sustain itself only so long without water. Three days earlier they had stood in desperate need of a miracle at the edge of a large body of water with Pharaoh and his army coming after them. Now they stood in desperate need of a miracle at a small body of water that was too bitter to drink.

They had finally come upon some water only to find it unable to meet their need. They faced a physical need for healing and refreshment, and their hopes had probably taken a hit after having seen the water in the distance only to discover it was too bitter to drink. So, the Israelites did what we normally do when things don't work out the way we want them to—they complained (verse 24). Three days after the great praise and worship festival, they moved from thanksgiving to grumbling.

The miracle at the Red Sea and the problem at Marah dealt with the same thing—water. The Israelites had come through water only to run out of water. They had seen that God could do miracles with water, but now they weren't so sure. Their dilemma resulted in a complaint session because their water problem had no visible solution. It didn't take long for them to forget what God had done and what God can do.

The Israelites' situation at Marah teaches us an important principle to remember when we're facing a problem: God has a purpose for your pain. He had a reason for allowing the Israelites to go through this difficult scenario. Verse 25 tells us He used it as a test. "There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them." In other words, water wasn't a problem.

Water was a test.

When we were in school, teachers test us only on things we are supposed to know. No good teacher would test a student on material he or she has not yet covered. A test reveals whether the student was paying attention when the information was given. The information God had given to the Israelites three days before Marah was that He was bigger than water. He was more powerful than water. He was greater than water. God could intervene in their water problem in a way they couldn't anticipate or predict. And three days after God taught the Israelites His lesson on water, He tested them on it—He gave them a water test.

God was leading Moses, and Moses had taken the Israelites straight into their test. He hadn't led them outside of God's will—an important point to note. You could be in a dry land even while being in God's will. You could be in God's will and not have a job. You could be in God's will and not experience perfect physical health. You could be in God's will and have relational difficulties. You could be in God's will and still run into a dry spell, just as the Israelites had done. God often uses these situations to administer a test.

This is because tests (or trials) are designed to do two things: They demonstrate whether we've been paying attention to the lessons we've learned, and they give God opportunities to reveal something new about Himself, which develops our character and strengthens our faith.

The night before Jesus was crucified, He prayed to His Father, asking Him not to take us out of the world, but to keep us safe in the world. The goal, Jesus realized, wasn't to steer around difficulty, but to navigate safely through it. That concept troubles some of us. We seem to think Christianity is designed to be a lifetime of smooth sailing. Not true. In this life, obstacles are inevitable.

Letting patience have its perfect effect means we must not lay down our pencils halfway through the test. Even if you have answered each question correctly, quitting halfway through limits your

score to 50 percent—an F in most schools. Working through our tests from beginning to end is much easier when we understand that God has a purpose for our problems.

God understands that the process is as important as the result. The journey through the wilderness is as important as the arrival at the Promised Land. That's why He sometimes doesn't deliver us from certain situations, but allows us to face them. Here is how you know you're failing the test—you begin complaining. We read earlier that when the Israelites reached the waters at Marah, they grumbled. They said amen and hallelujah on Sunday at the Red Sea, but they hit rock bottom on Wednesday and began to complain.

God sends tests to see whether you paid attention when He revealed new information to you. He doesn't just take your word for it. Every year I go to the doctor's office for an annual exam. I sit in his office, and he asks me, "How are you feeling?" If I had a good year overall, I answer, "I'm feeling fine." But that's not the end of my appointment. The doctor doesn't take my word for it. Instead, he checks my vitals, makes sure that my blood pressure is good, makes sure that my heart is good, checks my lungs. He may even send me out for blood work to check my cholesterol, and diabetes. My heart might feel fine to me, but it might not actually be fine. The doctor can determine the strength of my heart only by measuring it under stress. So he creates a stressful situation. He tests my heart to determine whether the way I feel is really how I am. I could have good feelings but still have a bad heart.

Living the Christian life is no different. You can come to church every week, sing worship songs, memorize Bible verses, serve on a variety of committees, and assume that your heart, faith, and soul are strong. You can even say, "I love You, God. You are so good. I'll follow You, God. I'll do whatever You say." But God doesn't simply take your word for it. He tests you and me because He wants what is best for us. He tests us because He's getting ready to do something amazing in our lives. He tests us by putting us in stressful situations—just as He did with the Israelites. He tests us to reveal whether we're truly looking to Him as our Source or we're looking elsewhere.

I often hear people say, “God will not put more on me than I can bear.” Let me debunk that myth right now with a brief glance at the life of Paul. In 2 Corinthians 1:8, Paul wrote, “For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction...that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life.” If ever there was a hopeless test, Paul was in it. Paul hadn’t done anything to cause it. In fact, he had followed God’s leading straight into a place of despair. If you share similar feelings today, you’re in good company.

God sometimes allows seemingly hopeless situations in our lives in order to direct our focus to Him and reveal the true nature of our faith. We may feel like giving up because no one can fix the situation we’re in. All our human resources have been depleted. But Paul reveals a key principle in his next statement. “Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead...He on whom we have set our hope” (verses 9-10).

In order to take Paul deeper in faith, God put him in a situation that his résumé, abilities, and connections couldn’t change. Why? So that Paul would learn to trust God. Is God being mean in these situations? We may think so when we’re going through them, but He’s actually trying to take us deeper. In these hopeless scenarios, when we see no way up, over, or out, God somehow ultimately “raises the dead” for us and becomes real to us at a level we never knew Him at before.

At the Red Sea, the Israelites apparently hadn’t learned that God is greater than water, so God decided to teach them again at Marah. We read that after Moses cried out to God on behalf of the grumbling group, “the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet” (Exodus 15:25). Tossing a tree into polluted water is most definitely an unorthodox way to purify it, but then again, raising a staff is an unnatural way to part a body of water. Through this second miracle, God revealed once again that He is more powerful than anything the Israelites could face.

The Lord Who Heals

After a second miracle in just three days, God discloses to the Israelites the meaning behind the test—He gives them a deeper glimpse into who He is. Once He got their undivided attention, He told them more about Himself. We've looked at the beginning verse already, but I'll include it again as the backdrop.

There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. And He said, *"If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD [Jehovah], am your healer [Rapha]"* (Exodus 15:25-26).

God used the water to teach the Israelites a lesson about His name—Jehovah Rapha. The Israelites couldn't drink the water because it was bitter, and the bitterness was an indication of something much worse. The water had somehow become polluted, diseased, or bacterially infested. It was undrinkable.

Living in America, we sometimes forget how important clean water is to sustaining our health. Yet according to United Nations statistics, close to 800 million people still don't have access to clean water each day. The UN issued a statement not long ago that more people die annually from polluted water than from war. When a person doesn't live in an area where water purification techniques are in place, any contact with water could bring illness and even death.

On first glance, most of us who reside in America may not see the immediate connection between the name Jehovah Rapha and the Israelites' test at the bitter waters of Marah, but for those who understand the danger of polluted water, the connection is clear. And through this connection, God ties the manifestation of His name to aligning all of life under Him and His commands.

Why did God put all of the diseases on the Egyptians while the Israelites were living in their land? Because the Egyptians didn't seek Him as the one true God. Rather, they worshipped idols, resulting in impure hearts. These impure hearts likewise resulted in the ten plagues, which no doubt brought illness, disease, and emotional issues on those they affected.

At Marah, God was telling the Israelites they could experience the pain of the unrighteous when they adopt the lifestyle and mindset of the unrighteous. He reminded them just who was the source of all healing, all provision, and all life, first through the parting of water and now through the purification of water.

Before we go further, I want to emphasize that the name Jehovah Rapha is not a guarantee that no one will ever get sick. If that were the case, pure-hearted followers of Jesus Christ would never die. That's not what this name is referring to.

The Bible almost always ties healing to the sin that caused the problem. We see this connection in various passages.

- "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103:2-3).
- "Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint" (Isaiah 1:5-6).
- "Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him" (James 5:14-15).

Sometimes people get sick simply because of old age, or because of pollutants in the air, or because of what they eat...but that isn't the sickness God is speaking of when He reveals Himself as Jehovah Rapha. He's talking about the diseases He Himself put on the Egyptians because the Egyptians were in rebellion against Him. You won't have to face those diseases when your heart is aligned under Him and His ways.

God says (paraphrase), “Here’s the lesson I want to teach you from Marah: If you will follow My instructions, I will heal your bodies, emotions, relationships, and circumstances. But if you choose to walk the way the rest of the world does, you will not be immune from the world’s diseases.”

The Israelites needed protection from the disease-carrying and bitter waters of Marah, and God provided a tree to make the water sweet. Perhaps today you’re facing bitterness of a different sort, but God can make even the bitter sweet when you align your life under Him. When you will pick up the tree, even though that seems odd and unconventional, and toss it in those bitter waters, the healing will come. In other words, it will come when you do the thing God has instructed you to do—not because it makes any sense at all, but because it doesn’t have to make sense. After all, He is God.

When you take your car to a drive-through car wash, it enters dirty and exits clean. But you need to do something as you enter that car wash. If you don’t do it, you won’t end up with a clean car. You have to put your car in neutral. If you don’t yield the direction of your car to the car wash itself, you won’t experience the purification that comes from the cleansing water.

Too many Christians want to come to church, read their Bibles, or say their prayers without yielding to God, without surrendering to His rule in their lives. And yet they wonder why their hearts, minds, and bodies aren’t healed. The reason is clear—they’re not fully experiencing God’s healing touch because they haven’t yielded to His control.

God says if you want to be in charge, you’ll have to suffer the consequences—you’ll have to fight diseases and disasters on your own. The key to your healing is having faith that if you submit to God’s divine authority, He will address everything you need in your life. When you do this, God restores your health and heals your wounds (Jeremiah 30:13-17).

The key to your difficult circumstances, relationships, and illness is in the statutes and commandments of God. When you live in the illumination of those statutes and commandments, you’ll find the purity you need to live abundantly.

God's ways of addressing the bitter situations in life won't always make sense. Just as God instructed Moses to throw a stick into the water, He may instruct you to do something that doesn't seem to add up. But when you will align your thoughts and actions under His ordinances and statutes, you will discover that He can turn anything into something far better than you could have ever imagined.

This is exactly why I love the ending to the narrative in which we discover the name Jehovah Rapha—because it demonstrates that when you align yourself under God in order to live in light of His healing power, He can give you more than enough. Exodus 15:27 says, *“Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.”*

Here we've gone from no water to bitter water to purified water to plenty of water. A spring isn't just a pool of water. Rather, it's a continual flow of fresh and pure water. After God taught the Israelites and revealed to them His name, Jehovah Rapha, He immediately took them to Elim, where there was more than enough of a good thing for everyone. But notice that the Israelites didn't get to Elim by skipping Marah. They got to Elim by going through the test at Marah. They discovered Elim once they discovered Jehovah Rapha.

God may be saying something to you right now. You might feel as if you're stuck at a bitter place in your life. You may not see the way out or be able to locate the source of healing for the sicknesses that plague you physically or emotionally. But God would love to take you to Elim, where you can enjoy your own private spring if you will simply learn the lesson of Marah and align your thoughts, heart, and actions under Him in full faith, belief, and trust.

The book of John tells us that this is your destiny if you will but seek Christ as Lord and Savior over your life. *“Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water’ ’ ” (7:37-38).*

You yourself will be a spring! You will not only experience health in your own mind, body, and relationships, you will also become a blessing that God uses to bring health to others.

When Naaman obeyed God, he received healing in his body (2 Kings 5). When Daniel obeyed God, he became healthier than all the other youths (Daniel 1). Doing life God's way is the secret to healing and freedom from the trappings that often weigh us down.

Even in the midst of our struggles, hurts, bitterness, and pain, God has a way to sweeten the waters and heal our bodies, souls, and spirits. He can use the pain and the suffering to make us stronger.

He is Jehovah Rapha.