

SS-God Provides Water from a Rock -Exodus 17:1-17-09/13/20

Intro: "We all have to understand that God is powerful and has the ability to solve all our problems."

I THE TESTS—Ex. 17:1-3

A The Lord tests the people (Ex. 17:1)

- a Challenges**-The Israelites that Moses led out of Egypt had already **encountered challenges along the way**. They had faced a **lack of drinking water at a place called Marah**, but God had miraculously provided the fresh water they needed (15:23-26). When their supplies ran low in the wilderness of Sin, **the Lord had brought them quails to eat and began the miraculous daily provision of manna, the bread from heaven** (16:1-15).
- b Camped**-Now the vast Israelite nation **journeyed through the wilderness of Sin to Rephidim**, where **they encamped**. The precise location is uncertain, but "as far as can be determined, Rephidim was located in the far southern Sinai, close to Mount Sinai" (Stuart, *New American Commentary: Exodus*, B&H Publishing). **Rephidim would be the Israelites' last stop before reaching Mount Sinai, where they would remain for a lengthy period of time.**
- c Chronology**-Exodus 17:1 says that at Rephidim "**there was no water for the people to drink.**" We cannot put together an exact chronology of Israel's travels, but we know they **reached Mount Sinai exactly three months after they departed from Egypt** (19:1). The lack of drinking water at Rephidim was encountered less than three months after their similar experience at Marah when God gave them fresh water to drink.
- d Cloud**-Our text makes it very clear, however, that **the Lord Himself had led the people to this place**. His means of leading them was the **pillar of cloud by day, which was also a pillar of fire by night**. The Lord's presence in the cloud provided divine guidance for them throughout their wilderness travels (cf. 13:21-22; 40:34-38).
- e Commandment**-The Lord's **clear guidance in leading the people to Rephidim** is equated with His "**commandment**," or **instruction** (17:1). It was not the people's choice, nor Moses', to camp there. Rather, **God had specifically directed them to this place where there was no water.**
- f Concept**-Why would He do this? **To test His people**. It had been only a few weeks since they had faced a similar situation. At that time, they had "**murmured against Moses**" (15:24) **rather than trust the Lord to provide the water they needed**. God had miraculously **turned bitter water into fresh water**, satisfying their immediate need. He had then led them to an oasis in the wilderness that provided abundant water for the congregation (vss. 25-27). Of that earlier incident, verse 25 says the Lord "**proved**" (tested) them.
- g Consistency**-Now He was testing them again. **Would they trust the Lord to provide for them as He had before?** Or would they once again grumble and complain? Had they learned their lesson, or would they continue their already established pattern? This was a very real test of their faith.

B The people test the Lord (Ex. 17:2-3)

- a Dispute**-The answer was not long in coming. The people began to "**chide with Moses**." That verb means "to strive" or "**contend**." It is employed for **verbal combat and sometimes used of a legal dispute** (Harris, Archer, and Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Moody). It could mean the people were not merely complaining against Moses but also arguing that they did not deserve what they were suffering.
- b Demands**-It is interesting that **the people demanded their drinking water from Moses**. They could not seem to look beyond their leader to the God who had made him their leader. **They seemed to think Moses could produce water for them at will**. They should have humbly asked him to pray and ask God for water, since **God was the one who was providing for them all along the way.**
- c Directed**-Moses' response was to ask the people **why they were contending with him and tempting the Lord**. His reply should have sounded familiar, for when the people had complained about a lack of bread and meat just a short time prior to this, Moses had said, "**Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord**" (16:8). Any **complaints against Moses were actually complaints against the Lord** because He was the one who had brought them to this place. If Moses was guilty of anything, it was obeying the Lord.
- d Definition**-"**Tempt**" here (17:2) means "**to test**" or "**prove**." It is the same Hebrew word used in Exodus 15:25 referring to God's testing the Israelites. "In most contexts [it] has **the idea of testing or proving the quality of someone or something, often through adversity or hardship**" (Harris, Archer, and Waltke).
- e Disastrous**-While it is appropriate for God to test people (cf. Gen. 22:1), it is entirely inappropriate for people to test God in a spirit of unbelief, as if He won't really follow through (cf. Deut. 6:16). In fact, as they learned later, tempting the Lord can have **disastrous consequences** (cf. Num. 14:22-23). However, testing the Lord in their unbelief is exactly what the Israelites were doing here.
- f Disloyalty**-In what sense was the congregation testing the Lord? **They were testing His patience with their ingratitude and demands**. They **did not appreciate what God had done and was doing for them**. Instead, they considered their circumstances unfair and demanded immediate relief. Indeed, as we shall see in Exodus 17:7, the people even questioned the Lord's presence among them.
- g Discounted**-Douglas Stuart points out that "The people should have known by then that God would provide their needs.... The day of this current protest, after all, was **one more day on which the people had been able to gather manna to feed themselves and their animals**. What they were doing was **refusing to wait for God to take care of them.**"
- h Distress**-In spite of their leader's words, the people continued to grumble and to direct their complaints against Moses (vs. 3). As they had done before (cf. 16:3), they accused Moses of bringing them out of Egypt to kill them and their families and livestock in the wilderness. **They were focused on their uncomfortable circumstances, and this focus warped their thinking beyond all reason**. They could see no potential value in their suffering because they would not look beyond their thirst to the God who had led them to this place.
- i Difficulties**-The tests we face in life not only teach us lessons; they also reveal our character. **The true character of the Israelites came out when they faced great difficulties**. They had not learned from previous experiences to look to the Lord to provide. Instead, they blamed their lot on Moses without realizing they were really blaming the Lord. **Their problem was not a lack of water but a lack of faith in God to meet their needs.**
- j Discernment**-Do we learn from the tests we face, or do we continue to focus on the problem rather than the One who can solve our problem? **Do we walk by faith in the Lord or never look beyond what we see with our eyes?**

II THE RESPONSES—Ex. 17:4-6

A	The response of Moses (Ex. 17:4)
a	Pleading -Moses responded properly by <u>appealing to the Lord</u> . The Lord was the one who had led them to this place and who had promised to take them to the Promised Land. He was also the one the nation should have turned to for deliverance rather than turn on Moses in their search for someone to blame. Moses thus exhibited the faith the Israelite people lacked.
b	Patience -Moses pleaded, “ <i>What shall I do unto this people ?</i> ” “ <i>Unto</i> ” is best understood here as meaning “ <i>with respect to</i> .” Moses was utterly frustrated with the people . He was a patient man, but he did not have the patience the Lord possessed. He did not know what he should do, and it appeared the people were ready to stone him to death. In fact, he was doing exactly what he should do with regard to the people. He was taking their needs and his own to the Lord.
c	Plain -Numbers 12:3 tells us Moses was a very “meek” man . The word there means “ <i>humble</i> ” or “ <i>restrained</i> .” Moses had his failings, as we all do, but he was humble enough to know he could not appease the people . The Lord had used him mightily in the past, but he could not give them water or anything else they needed on his own. He could only go to the Lord .
d	Prayer -As Christians, we acknowledge the power of prayer but too often pray as a last resort rather than a continual practice . For some reason we think we can provide for our own needs and for those who depend on us. We should never lose sight of the simple truth that we are dependent on the Lord for our “ <i>daily bread</i> ” (Matt. 6:11). It is to Him we should turn for strength, help, and the wisdom we need to meet every challenge we face in life.
e	Protection -Some see Moses’ plea as being motivated by fear that the congregation would kill him. Such a fear certainly seems justified. However, the fact that Moses mentioned this probably has less to do with seeking protection from the Lord and more to do with demonstrating how seriously he took the situation . He recognized that something had to be done soon and that only the Lord could do it.
B	The response of the Lord (Ex. 17:5-6)
a	Instructions -As always, the Lord was waiting with a solution to the problem . He instructed Moses to go out in front of the people, taking with him “ <i>the elders of Israel</i> ” and the staff the Nile River had been struck with (7:17-21). At a certain rock , the Lord would be standing in front of him. Moses was to strike the rock with his staff, and water would gush forth from it in such abundance that all the people could drink.
b	Instrument -Once again Moses would be the instrument God would use to provide for the people . Moses was the one the people had attacked, and this miracle would again vindicate his leadership . The elders would serve as witnesses to this event , passing on to all the Israelites what had happened since two to three million people could not all personally see what Moses was doing .
c	Indication -Moses’ staff is also referred to as the “ <i>rod of God</i> ” (4:20; 17:9). The staff symbolized the power, authority, and presence of the Lord , and it was clearly connected with Moses as well, indicating he was God’s appointed leader.
d	Inspiration -The Lord’s promise to stand before Moses on the rock probably meant the pillar of cloud would move to that place , pointing out the specific rock but also encouraging Moses as the Lord stood with him while the elders looked on. The rock is called “ <i>the rock of Horeb</i> ” (vs. 6). Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai (cf. Ex. 19:11; Deut. 4:10). The Israelites were near Mount Sinai at this point, and the slopes of the Sinai mountain range probably reached Rephidim, so Horeb could aptly be applied to the rock.
e	Interpretation -Moses did as the Lord instructed, and water came forth from the rock in great abundance. In fact, Psalm 105:41 says it became a river . In I Corinthians 10:4, Paul indicates the rock that was struck represented Christ . He too was struck, and He provides the water of life to all who believe in Him.

III THE REBUKE—Ex. 17:7

A	Massah and Meribah (Ex. 17:7a)
a	Identified -The Lord graciously and miraculously provided the water His people needed. At the same time, Moses rightly gave them a lasting reminder of the sinful attitude they exhibited on this occasion. He gave to that place the name “ <i>Massah, and Meribah</i> .” In Hebrew, Massah means “ <i>tempting</i> ” or “ <i>testing</i> ”; Meribah means “ <i>strife</i> ” or “ <i>contention</i> .”
c	Incident -Like Horeb and Sinai, this place had two names (cf. Deut. 33:8), though often only one of the names is used (cf. Num. 20:13, 24; Deut. 6:16; 9:22). The names would forever recall that the people had tested the Lord there and contended with His servant Moses .
B	Moses’ reproach (Ex. 17:7b)
a	Proof -Moses added that the people had tested the Lord by saying, “ <i>Is the Lord among us, or not ?</i> ” This greatly added to their guilt . It was bad enough to complain about their circumstances, but they had also questioned God’s presence among them . His presence among them was obvious, for the pillar of cloud was visible and the manna arrived each morning from the hand of the Lord . Their denial of the obvious was a challenge to God and an insult. The names “Massah” and “Meribah” would act as a standing rebuke of their godless attitude.
b	Posture -Do we ever question the Lord’s presence with us because times are difficult and God has not given us relief? To do so is to adopt an attitude that deserves rebuke and demands repentance . Troubles should drive us to trust the One who has been so faithful to us through the years and praise Him that He is sovereign and in control of all our circumstances, good and bad.

Conclusion: "It is wise to look for the hand of God in all our situations."