

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 17:1-7

To understand more about the water from the rock (who is Christ).

Read the Text:

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5 And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?" (Exodus 17:1-7, ESV)

Study the Text:

Dying of Thirst

Verse 1 indicates that the Israelites continued in the wilderness of Sin, a location they first arrived to in Exodus 16:1, but finally make their way through it and into Rephidim. We also learn that they do this "according to the commandment of the LORD" (Ex. 16:1), indicating that their arrival in Rephidim was not their own choosing, but was dictated to them. This is a significant detail given that they once again find themselves without water. Below is a breakdown of this passage with key details and concepts found throughout it.

TESTING GOD

After arriving in Rephidim and finding no water to drink, the people begin to "quarrel" with Moses, saying: "Give us water to drink" (Ex. 16:2). The word quarrel is probably better understood to mean something like "protesting," which indicates a one-way complaint and not a debate (as *quarrel* might convey). Rephidim is, according to Exodus 19:1-2 and Numbers 33:15, the closest geographical location before arriving at Sinai (where both the Ten Commandments will officially be given and the Mosaic covenant will be established). That they arrived according to God's commandment means that God did not mistakenly or unintentionally lead them there, nor was He unaware that there would not be water. This leads Moses to respond to their complaints by warning them of their lack of faith at the end of verse 2: "Why do you test the LORD?" In other words, if God had led them there, to complain about a lack of water is to in essence believe that God has either no ability to give them drink or has dubiously led them there to die, both of which strike against the character of God that had already been revealed. If God would not only feed His people supernaturally through the manna from heaven, a manna that would have been seen as a delicacy (as we learned last week), why then would the people assume He led them to Rephidim to die of thirst or that He was incapable of providing water for them in the same way He provided them food? This is a faithless proposition and one that miscalculates everything God had done for them up to this point.

Moses' response makes no difference: "But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?'" (Ex. 17:3).

THE STAFF AND THE ROCK

Apparently, while the text doesn't explicitly describe it, Moses is led to think that the people are so angry about the lack of water that they are threatening to stone him, and so Moses cries out to the LORD in an effort to find a solution (Ex. 17:4). The LORD then commands Moses to take the same staff he used to curse the Nile with blood (Ex. 7:15-18) and use it to "strike a rock" that God leads him to in the presence of all of the people and especially the elders. The wording in Hebrew indicates that Moses is to do this in a very public manner that the people are able to see. The presence of the elders closest to him indicates that they would see clearly the miracle that the LORD was about to perform and be able to dispel the angst and frustration among the larger crowds as trustworthy members of their community. God tells Moses in verse 6, "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb," indicating that the LORD was present with Moses though He was not visible to the human eye. God would perform this miracle Himself, and not from a distance either.

THE IDENTITY OF THE ROCK

The close proximity of Rephidim to Sinai is now confirmed in that Moses is standing on a rock at Horeb, another name for Sinai. After striking the rock, waters gushed out of it, providing water for all of the people. Moses, in turn, named the waters "Massah and Meribah" (Ex. 17:7). Old Testament scholar Douglas Stuart adds: "In Hebrew, 'Massah' means 'testing/trial/temptation,' and 'Meribah' means 'protest/contention/quarrel/strife.'" Only here is the location identified by both its names.¹ As is common, the naming of places or things is significant. In the place where there was testing or temptation and protest and strife, God provided waters for His people. Again, this is a story of grace. The people are undeserving and faithless, and yet God in His goodness provides for them.

THE OTHER IDENTITY OF THE ROCK

In 1 Corinthians 10, the apostle Paul tells the church that much of what occurred in the Old Testament occurred "as an example" for us today, in order that we might avoid their failures (1 Cor. 10:6). In the first few verses he writes: "For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food" (1 Cor. 10:1-3). This accounts for everything we have read in Exodus thus far, and Paul's point is that these things happened as an example for us. But then verse 4 indicates something about the true identity of the rock Moses struck in Exodus 17: "...and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ." In some figurative manner, the rock is none other than Jesus Christ, prior to His incarnation. This is significant for at least two reasons. One, it indicates that the LORD's presence spoken of in Exodus 17:6 is the presence specifically of God the Son, Jesus Christ. Moreover, it indicates secondly that Jesus existed prior to His incarnation. Jesus is more than merely a teacher or miracle worker, but as the Nicene Creed puts it: "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made."

What About Now?

One takeaway is the way in which God will lead His people into a situation where they are forced to depend upon Him. The LORD leads His people to Rephidim and Horeb, where there is no water, and then provides

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2 of The New American Commentary, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 392.

water in a supernatural manner, reinforcing God's ability and willingness to provide for His people when they do not possess what they need. Another takeaway is the preeminence of Jesus Christ even prior to His incarnation in the Old Testament. He is the Rock that followed the Israelites and provided for them along the way.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 17:1. Where did the Israelites move through and to where did they arrive? Why did they choose Rephidim? What did they not find there?

2. Read Exodus 17:2. What did the people do in response to the lack of water? How does Moses respond?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 17:3. How did the people respond to what Moses said?

2. Read Exodus 17:4. What did Moses say to God in light of the people's anger?

Day Three

1. Read Exodus 17:5. What does God tell Moses to do and what is he to use to accomplish this?

2. Read Exodus 17:6. What does God promise Moses He will do? Where the rock located? What is significant about this location? What will the effect be of striking the rock? Why are the elders called to witness it?

Day Four

1. Read Exodus 17:7. What does Moses call the waters? What do the names mean? (Hint: See above notes)

2. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. Who does Paul reveal the "Rock" to be? Why is this significant?

Discuss the Text!**Week 41 Discussion: Dependence on God**

One of the key themes in Exodus as a whole and in this passage in particular is the importance of trusting God. God often will lead His people into places that force us to depend upon Him (2 Cor. 1:8-9). In this passage, He leads His people to a place where there is no water so that they must depend on Him, as they did with the manna and the quail. He often does this with believers today, as well, that we might depend on Him. Talk as a group about the importance of dependence on God and the difficulty of resisting the temptation to take matters into your own hands.

1. Icebreaker: What is something you don't think you could live without?
2. Has God ever led you to a place that forced you into dependence? Share the details with the group.
3. Is it hard to trust God when you lack something you need?
4. Have you ever tried to "take matters into your own hands?" How did that work out for you?
5. Does God still provide for His people today? Why or why not?
6. How is the church used by God to provide for others today?

Takeaways:

1. The people of God are led by God to Rephidim, where there is no water.
2. After complaining about the lack of water, God gives Moses instructions to strike a rock with his staff in order that water might come out of it and provide for the congregation of Israel.