

Exodus 17:1-7
Israel's Third Crisis: Water

I miss school

- I know, some of you may think I am crazy for saying that

But out of my 35 years of life, I have been in school 21 of them

- That's 2/3 of my life!

There is a certain discipline and routine that inevitably comes with education

- I didn't enjoy that very much during high school
- But I began to appreciate it during Bible college and seminary

Now that I am out of school, I still enjoy reading

- I enjoy the daily habits of praying, studying, and scheduling
- The discipline still continues

Just because I am out of school doesn't mean that the tests are over, either

- God is faithful to send those my way, as He sees fit

As Christians, we will encounter various tests

- A lot of them will come when we least expect it
- They will be pop quizzes

The tests are not designed to show God how strong or weak we are

- God already knows our hearts perfectly

The tests are for our own benefit

- To see our weaknesses
- To see our strengths

The mark of a wise believer is learning from our tests

- Making the necessary changes
- Learning new habits
- Dealing with sin in our lives

As we continue to examine the history of Israel, ask God to teach you

- There is much to learn from reading and studying God's dealings with Israel

Let's read Exodus 17:1-16

In these verses, we encounter another crisis that Israel faced

- Crisis of water (17:1-7)

1 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim,

The last time we left Israel, they were in the wilderness of Sin

- They had put the Red Sea in their rear-view mirror
- They were on their way to the Promised Land!

But as Kris reminded us last Sunday, God wanted to teach Israel a few lessons while in the wilderness

- To humble them
- To show them the nature of their faith

Here in Exodus 17:1, we see Israel on the move again

- They moved from the wilderness of Sin “**and camped at Rephidim**”

Don't skip over this verse too quickly

- There is an extremely important phrase found in verse 1

Notice these words, “**according to the command of the LORD**”

- They weren't wandering haphazardly
- They weren't lost

No, God was strategically leading His people¹

- He had specific lessons to teach them along their journey

Church, we need to understand that there are no accidents with God

- He doesn't make mistakes
- He never needs to use white-out or an eraser

Any time that we find ourselves in a situation where our faith is being tested, it is always with a Divine purpose

- God didn't make a mistake

and there was no water for the people to drink.

When Israel arrives at Rephidim, they immediately encounter a problem

- “**there was no water for the people to drink**”

Does this sound familiar?

- It should!

After delivering His people at the Red Sea, the LORD's first test for Israel was one involving water

- The waters of Marah were bitter
- The people complained

The next test was one of food

- God supplied quail and manna

Now it seems that the first test is being repeated

- But why?

¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Exodus*, 406.

Let me answer that question with another question, “Do you always learn the first time you go through a trial?”

- I don’t

If we really knew our hearts, we would be ashamed at how many times we have to endure the same trial

- We are prone to forget!
- We are slow to learn!

What should Israel have done?

- Fall down on their knees, asking God for help
- Trust God
- Wait to see how God would provide

But that’s not what happened

- Look at verse 2

2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water that we may drink.”

We are told that the people “**quarreled with Moses**”

- This is a different word from “grumbling” or “complaining” that we have seen earlier

In other words, things are getting worse

- Not better

Notice what they say, “**Give us water that we may drink.**”

- In case you missed it, they were commanding Moses
- The people were telling the God-appointed leader what to do!

Where is their trust?

- Where is their submission to God and to His leaders?
- Where is their patience?

It’s almost like they had completely forgotten everything God had done

- He had delivered them from Egypt
- He had parted the waters of the Red Sea
- He had led them with the pillar
- He had provided water, quail, and manna for them

But it was as if Israel suffered from amnesia

- They had forgotten all of God’s blessings

Could Moses provide enough water for Israel?

- No

Could God provide enough water for Israel?

- Yes!

But Israel isn’t praying to God

- They are placing unrealistic expectations on Moses

Israel isn't submitting to God's timing and plan²

- They are being defiant
- They are being irreverent
- They are walking by sight, and not by faith

And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"

Unlike Israel, Moses responds in a good manner

First, he asks, "Why do you quarrel with me?"

- In other words, why are you making such a fuss with me?
- What can I do to help?

Wasn't Moses in the same predicament?

- Did Moses have his own private stash of water?
- No!
- He was suffering alongside them!

Second, Moses asks, "Why do you test the LORD?"

- Ouch!

The question itself is a rebuke, isn't it?

- Israel wasn't really quarreling with Moses
- They were really testing the LORD

Look back at Exodus 16:8

- "the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD"

The principle is the same in both passages

- When you grumble, we really grumble against God
- When you quarrel, you are really testing the LORD

Let's consider this word "test" some more

- There is an incredible truth here that you might miss

Look back with me at two previous passages

- Exodus 15:25, "Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw *it* into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them" (emphasis mine)
- Exodus 16:4, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction" (emphasis mine)

What do these two passages have in common?

- God was testing His people
- He was examining Israel

² John L. Mackay, *A Mentor Commentary, Exodus*, 298.

Remember Deuteronomy 8:2, “**And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not**” (emphasis mine)

- Would they pass the test?

But look with me here at Exodus 17:2

- Look carefully!

We read these words of Moses, “**Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?**”

- Did you catch the difference?

It is perfectly acceptable for God to test His people

- He has the right to do so

But is perfectly unacceptable for God’s people to test God!

- We do not have the right to do so

The lack of water was a Divine test from God for Israel³

- But Israel used it as a means of testing God Himself!

God has nothing to prove to us

- He is perfect
- He doesn’t need to be tested

By their quarreling, Israel was showing that their hearts were not being obedient

- Not only were they complaining
- But they were now putting God on trial!

How are we guilty of putting God to the test?

- Let’s consider a few avenues
- You can probably think of more

We put God to the test

- When we doubt His kindness in any given situation
- When we question His providence
- When we grumble and complain under the weight of a trial
- When we openly accuse Him of leaving and deserting His people
- When we think we deserve better circumstances than God has given us

There is nothing wrong with bringing out petitions and concerns to God

- As a matter of fact, we are told to do that

The problem is when we come to God with a wrong attitude

- Complaining
- Demanding
- Insisting
- Rebelling

³ Kaiser, 406.

3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, “Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

The thirst for water was a real, tangible need

- There was no denying that

But the way in which Israel went about asking for water was entirely wrong

- It was actually irreverent

We are told, “**they grumbled against Moses**”

- 15:24 – they grumbled about the water at Marah
- 16:2 – they grumbled about the lack of food
- 17:3 – they were grumbling again for water

Notice what they say to Moses, “**Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?**”

- This is accusatory language

They weren’t thinking the best about their leaders

- They were thinking the worst

In their minds, they truly thought that Moses had masterminded a cruel plan to bring Israel out into the middle of the wilderness to die

- How illogical is that?

Let’s assume briefly that Moses did have that as a plan (even though we know it’s not the case)

- Hadn’t God overridden him twice?
 - o Changing the bitter water into sweet water
 - o Providing quail and manna

Even if (and he didn’t) Moses had this sinister plan, he wasn’t in control!

- God was in control!

Israel should have been trusting in God

- But they weren’t

Israel should have been faithfully following Moses, as their God-appointed leader

- But they weren’t

This is now the 2nd time that Israel has accused Moses of trying to kill them

- The first time was in 16:3, “**you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger**”

Their statement here in 17:3 also helps us to understand Exodus 16 in a better light

- Remember how they cried out for meat and bread (Ex 16:3)?

This verse is a crystal clear commentary that Israel had meat

- Their livestock!

But Israel didn’t want to kill their own livestock

- They wanted God to provide more, so they wouldn’t have to sacrifice

We are like that sometimes, aren't we?

- Our cupboards are running over
- Our bank accounts have money

Yet we cry out, "Lord, provide our needs!"

- When, in reality, God has already provided our needs

4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me."

Once again, Moses does the right thing

- "Moses cried out to the LORD"

He hears these words, but immediately takes them to God in prayer

- What an example!

On multiple occasions, Moses shows this same response (Ex 32:30; Num 11:2; 12:13; 14:13ff)⁴

But then notice how Moses' fear comes into sharp focus

- "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me."

Notice the element of distancing from himself and Israel by the phrase "this people"⁵

- He isn't identifying himself with them
- He speaks as if he isn't a part of Israel

Moses then says, "A little more and they will stone me"

- Moses wasn't exaggerating!

Israel thought that Moses was trying to kill them

- Now Moses thinks that Israel will kill him!

Moses wasn't the only person to be threatened with stoning⁶

- Stephen was killed by stoning (Acts 7)
- Paul was stoned, yet not killed (Acts 14:19)
- Even Jesus faced the threat of stoning (John 10:31)

5 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go."

What would you do with Israel?

- What would you do with Moses?

God didn't ask us what we would do

- Because our response would, most likely, be a sinful one

⁴ Kaiser, 406.

⁵ Ronald F. Youngblood, *Everyman's Bible Commentary, Exodus*, 86.

⁶ R. Alan Cole, *Tyndale OT Commentaries, Exodus*, 135.

Once again, God does the most remarkable thing

- He provides for His sinful, grumbling, quarreling people

The LORD gives Moses some specific instructions

- “pass before the people”
- “take with you some of the elders of Israel”
- “take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile”

As Israel’s leader, Moses was to go out in front

- But he wouldn’t be going by himself

Moses was to take “some of the elders of Israel”

- Not all, but some

These elders were to be witnesses of the miracle that would soon take place⁷

- The elders would be able to validate what happened back to the people

Moses was also to take the “staff” with him

- This was the visible representation of the power of God

This was the same staff that Moses had when he “struck the Nile”

- The reminder of this event wasn’t accidental

What was God going to do?

- Would God kill the entire camp of Israel?
- Would God send a plague upon the camp?

We know from the rest of the OT that God didn’t do that here

- Although He could have

6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.”

Notice the first word of verse 6, “Behold”

- Don’t miss this!
- This is important!
- Are you paying attention?

The LORD’s words are astounding

- “I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb”

“Horeb” is the place where God first appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:1)⁸

- Now Moses is here again

Did you catch that?

- God Himself would stand before Moses and the elders
- Literally, “to your face”

⁷ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the OT, Exodus*, 370.

⁸ John D. Currid, *An EP Study Commentary, Exodus, Vol 1*, 361.

In other words, Moses and the elders would see yet another demonstration of God's power

- We are not told whether Israel could catch a glimpse of this or not

The LORD continues speaking to Moses, “**and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink**”

- This sounds ridiculous, doesn't it?

Moses will strike a rock and water will come out?

- Are you kidding?

Let's be Sherlock Holmes for a few moments

- Let's observe a few things

First, Moses was told to “**strike**” the rock

- He was to hit the rock with the staff

“**strike**” is the same word used back in verse 5 to speak of when Moses struck the Nile River back in Egypt

- But there was a big difference between the two events⁹

With the Nile, the striking with the staff interrupted the people's water supply

- The water was no longer fit to drink

Here with the striking of the rock, the striking of the staff would open up the people's water supply

- The water would flow freely from the rock

Again, this seems so wrong, doesn't it?

- What good will it do to strike a rock with a wooden staff?

Second, Moses was told to strike “**the rock**”

- Not just any rock
- But a specific rock

This is significant because some would say that this whole incident is just a naturalistic phenomenon

- They would say that there was a thin layer of rock on top of a body of water
- In striking the rock, the water would then be accessible

But God doesn't say, “Strike any rock.”

- God says, “**Strike the rock**” (emphasis mine)

Third, notice that after striking the rock, “**water will come out of it, that the people may drink**”

God is very specific

- He does not say, “Water will come out beneath it”
- God says, “**water will come out of it**”

In other words – I know this sounds crazy – water would literally come out from within the rock!

- It would be yet another miracle!

⁹ Kaiser, 406.

The result would be just what the people wanted

- Water to drink!

And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Moses follows through with obedience

- No hesitation
- No complaints

Can you imagine being Israel?

- You have just expressed your worst thoughts toward Moses
- And now God is moving Moses and some of the elders toward the front

Perhaps some of the Israelites thought, “What is God going to do with Moses and the elders?”

- Would there be judgment?

Things must have been tense!

Isn't it interesting that the actual provision of water is somewhat minimized here?

- Verse 6 tells us that Moses obeyed

But we want more information!

- What about the water?
- What about the rejoicing?

God truly brought water from the rock

- We know that because of the many passages that address this very miracle

Consider these verses that speak of the water from the rock¹⁰

- “He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, *with its* fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint” (Deut 8:15)
- “He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave *them* abundant drink like the ocean depths. He brought forth streams also from the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. Behold, He struck the rock, so that waters gushed out, and streams were overflowing; can He give bread also? Will He provide meat for His people?” (Ps 78:15, 16, 20)
- “He opened the rock, and water flowed out; it ran in the dry places *like a river*” (Ps 105:41)
- “Who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of water” (Ps 114:8)
- “And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts. He made the water flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock, and the water gushed forth” (Isa 48:21)

This event was miraculous in nature

- God literally brought water out of a rock
- That's scientifically impossible!

At Marah, God started with bitter water

- And He made that bitter water sweet

¹⁰ Youngblood, 86.

But here at Rephidim, God did something amazing

- He created water from a rock!¹¹

Strangely, all of this wonderful information is overlooked

- For a very specific reason, I think

Look at verse 7

7 And he named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?”

Moses named the place where they were “**Massah and Meribah**”

- That probably means nothing to you, does it?

Let me teach you a little Hebrew¹²

- “**Massah**” means “testing”
- “**Meribah**” means “quarreling”

Back in Exodus 15, the place of bitter water was called Marah

- “**Marah**” is the Hebrew word for bitter

In Exodus 16, there was no mention of a renaming of the place where Israel grumbled about a lack of food

Here in Exodus 17, Rephidim is known by the double title “**Massah and Meribah**”

- A twin reminder of the testing and quarreling

The sin of Israel was not to be forgotten¹³

- Their double sin was to be etched into their memory through the naming of this place

The psalm that we read earlier records the sin of Israel vividly

- “**Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness; when your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work**” (Ps 95:8-9)

Think of all that Israel had witnessed since leaving Egypt

- They plundered the Egyptians
- They followed the pillar by day and night
- They witnessed the parting of the Red Sea
- They saw the bitter waters of Marah become sweet
- They were given quail and manna to eat

Yet here in verse 7, they still ask, “**is the LORD among us, or not?**”

- What an insult!

After Israel had seen all that the LORD had done, they still asked, “Are You still there, God?”

- But Israel isn’t alone

¹¹ Currid, 359.

¹² Youngblood, 86.

¹³ Keil and Delitzsch, 370.

Last week, Kris was open and honest about his own struggles after putting Chelle and Whitney on the plane

- It was a time in which Kris' faith was being tested

As you read the biographies of faithful men and women over the years, you will see this recurring theme

- God's people suffer

God could very easily take us from salvation to glory

- But He seldom does that

God's normal pattern for His people is the path of sanctification

- The ups and the downs
- The joys and the sorrows
- The roses and the thorns

God does this to make us depend on Him more

- To appreciate Him more
- To love Him more
- To trust Him more

We have seen some tremendous truths this morning in our study of these verses

- If not dealt with, a complaining heart can become a quarrelsome heart
- If not addressed, a complaining and quarrelling heart can become a bitter heart
- It is very easy to become frustrated with God
- The culture around us can reshape how we define "success" in the Christian life
- We can much more quickly ask God "Why?" – yet it is much harder for us to ask Him "What do You want me to learn through this trial?"

But there is something here that is so utterly amazing that we would completely miss it if we didn't have the rest of Scripture

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 10

- I know that we have looked at this passage several times over the past few weeks

But there is an unmistakable connection between 1 Corinthians 10 and Exodus 17

- I would go so far as to say that 1 Corinthians 10 is a Divine commentary on Exodus 17

Let's read 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

- "For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, 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; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ."

Notice the five-fold repetition of "all"

- "all under the cloud"
- "all passed through the sea"
- "all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea"
- "all ate the same spiritual food"
- "all drank the same spiritual drink"

The Israelites shared

- A spiritual guidance (cloud)
- A spiritual deliverance (Red Sea)
- A spiritual identification (following Moses)
- A spiritual provision (food and drink)

Notice the three-fold repetition of “**spiritual**”

- Spiritual food
- Spiritual drink
- Spiritual rock

The manna was spiritual in that it came from above

- But it was real food
- Not imaginary

The water was spiritual in that it was provided by God Himself

- But it was real water
- Not imaginary

The rock was spiritual

- Remember what God told Moses in Exodus 17:6, “**I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb**”

But the mind-boggling reality is given in 1 Corinthians 10:4

- “**they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ**”

Are you ready for this?

- The rock that Moses struck – was Christ

I didn't say that

- Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said it

We know that God was making Himself known in the cloud

- Now we know that God was making Himself known in the rock

Later, in the book of Numbers, Moses would be told to speak to the rock (cf. Num 20)

- But Moses struck the rock twice

God was the Provider for Israel in the wilderness

- He provided water
- He provided meat
- He provided protection
- He provided guidance

All of this was in spite of the fact that they weren't deserving of it

- They grumbled
- They quarreled
- They quickly turned against their leaders
- They quickly put God to the test

The Rock that provided the water for Israel would one day provide salvation for all who would believe

- Jesus Christ is that Rock

From the prophecy of Isaiah, we know what happened to Jesus Christ

- “He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.” (Isa 53:3-5)

Some just see a rock

- Others see Jesus

Some think of Jesus as merely a good person or good Teacher

- Others see Him as Lord, Savior, King, Prophet, and Priest

Where is your trust this morning?

- Are you submitting to Christ?
- Or are you grumbling against Him?

Feel the weight of this Text, church!

- Feel the weight of Israel testing God
- Feel the weight of their rebellion against God and His appointed leadership
- Feel the grace that moved God to provide for undeserving sinners

Then look to Christ

- Thank Him for His provision of temporal matters (food, drink)
- But thank Him even more for His provision of Himself (salvation)