

Exodus 17
Psalm 95
1 Corinthians 10

“That Rock Was Christ”

April 16, 2017

Who are the Amalekites – and what are they doing here?!

The Amalekites have the dubious distinction
to be the first people who attacked the nation of Israel.

The Amalekites are descended from a grandson of Esau – Jacob’s brother.
Esau had recognized that Jacob had a rightful inheritance in the Land.
But his descendants repudiate their father and now seek to kill Jacob’s heirs.

Here in Exodus 17, God says that “The LORD will have war with Amalek
for generation to generation.”

Later, in Deuteronomy 25:17-19, the LORD will tell Israel
that when they come into the land, and the LORD gives them rest from their enemies,
they are to blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.

So, when Saul becomes king, in 1 Samuel 15 –
the LORD calls Saul to destroy the Amalekites.
God commanded him to destroy everything in a war of utter destruction –
a war of eschatological judgment,
whereby the son of God would bring final judgment upon the Amalekites.
But Saul failed.
He took the King of the Amalekites, Agag, captive –
and took lots of plunder (claiming that it was for sacrifice to the LORD).
Because Saul refused to obey the voice of the LORD,
the LORD removed him from being king.

And 1 Samuel 30 – an Amalekite raid captures the wives and children of David and his men,
and so he leads them to recover their families – and destroys the Amalekites.

It is important to see that *David* does what Saul failed to do.
David is the one who blots out the Amalekites.

Indeed, after the time of David, the Amalekites drop out of the biblical narrative.
Only one Amalekite is named later in biblical history.

Remember how Saul failed to kill Agag, the king of the Amalekites?
In the book of Esther, many centuries later,
Saul’s kinsman, Mordecai, will encounter the last of the Amalekites:
Haman, the Agagite

(Agagite means “of the family of Agag”).
Mordecai will finish what his ancestor failed to do.

Truly, “The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

It’s worth remembering that the LORD does not come *begging* people to repent.
He *commands* all people everywhere to repent.

Our Psalm of response urges us to heed that warning, and worship the LORD!

Sing Psalm 95

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

That Rock was Christ.

What does Paul mean?

What does it mean “They drank from the spiritual rock that followed them,
and the rock was Christ”?

Some of the rabbis had taught that the rock of Massah and Meribah
actually followed Israel through the wilderness,
so that their water – as well as their bread – was provided by God.

Part of the reason why they said that
is because in Numbers 20, we hear about a second episode with a rock.

The people are quarreling with Moses about water again –
and in Numbers 20, verse 8, God tells Moses,
“Take the staff, and assemble the congregation,
you and Aaron your brother,
and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water.
So you shall bring water out of the rock for them
and give drink to the congregation and their cattle.”

Which rock?

“The rock before their eyes.”

In Numbers 20, the people seem to *know* which rock should produce water.
There is a particular rock which they expect to “yield its water.”

And indeed, we are told in Numbers 20:13,
“These are the waters of Meribah [the waters of quarreling],
where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD.”

So when the rabbis said that the rock *followed them*
that is a very plausible explanation.

If you are being led by a pillar of cloud and fire –
if you are being fed by manna every day –
it would hardly be odd to see a rock following you through the desert!

1. Water from the Rock (17:1-7)

a. “Give Us Water” – from Grumbling to Quarreling (v1-3)

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.

In verse 1 we hear that they camped at Rephidim.

Rephidim is very close to Mt. Sinai – also known as Mt. Horeb

(since verse 6 indicates that Horeb was a short walk from Rephidim).

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?”

Verses 1-3 provide us with a brief picture of grumbling and rebellion:

First, there is a problem – no water.

That’s a pretty significant problem!

They are in the desert – and there is no water.

If something doesn’t change, they are going to *die*.

So, the first thing to see about rebellion,

is that rebellion always proceeds from *very good reasons*.

There is always a good reason to grumble and rebel!

If you had gone to the Israelites in the wilderness and said,

“Don’t worry, God will provide!”

They would have replied,

“When? after we are dead?!

We need water now.

Where was God when our fathers died in Egypt?

Why do you grumble?

Maybe you grumble at rude drivers.

And you have good reason, don’t you?!

If they keep that up, they’ll kill someone!

Maybe you grumble because you want to get married:

You know that you’d be a great husband or wife –

why doesn’t anyone realize that?!

Or maybe you grumble because you *are* married –

and your spouse doesn't appreciate you sufficiently.

We all have good reasons for our grumbling.

There is a *problem*.

The problems that Israel faces in the wilderness are *perfect* for us to consider.

Because everyone has to admit that Israel's problems are *fundamental* problems.

If you don't have food and water – you will die.

And that's a *problem*.

So first we see the problem – there is no water.

But second, we learn about our hearts.

How do we respond to problems?

We grumble.

We quarrel.

Why?

James 4:1-3 says it well:

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

Is it not this – that your passions are at war within you?

You desire and do not have, so you murder.

You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

You do not have, because you do not ask.

You ask and do not receive,

because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”

So there is a problem – there is something missing in your life.

So we grumble – we quarrel.

How's that working out for you?!

Is your grumbling and quarreling making life better?

When you gossip and whine – maybe you feel better for a moment,

but what does it really accomplish?

When you blow up and get mad and yell –

where does it get you?

You are still dying of thirst in the desert.

Over the years, Ginger and I have done a lot of marriage counseling –

and just “relationship counseling” –

and this is the problem that we have seen every time!

People are dying of thirst in the desert –
and so they respond in fear and mistrust.

And so this the third point:

First, yes, there is a problem – we are dying of thirst!
Second, we respond to the problem by grumbling and quarreling.
Third, we need someone to speak into our problem.

And that's what Moses does in verse 2:

“Why do you quarrel with me?”
And then he zeroes in on the heart of the issue:
“Why do you test the LORD?”

You can almost feel the anger that bursts out of Israel in verse 3:

“Test the LORD?!”
Are you kidding me?!
We're going to die in this desert –
and you dare to ask, ‘Why do you test the LORD?’!
We test the LORD because *we need water!*”

As long as your problems drive your heart,
you will continue to grumble, to quarrel, and to rebel against the Lord.

And you can see a picture of a proper response in verse 4:

b. “What Shall I Do with This People?” – Moses Cried to the LORD (v4)

⁴ *So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”*

Notice that God does not object to honesty!

Moses comes to God with a proper complaint:
What shall I do with this people?!
He comes in a posture of trust –
confident that God will take care of it –
and yet with a certain sense of urgency:

They are almost ready to stone me.

Um, God, if you don't do something, I'm going to be dead!

How many Psalms follow this pattern?!

It is not grumbling to say to God, as we sang in Psalm 88 on Friday night,
“O LORD, why do you cast my soul away?”

Why do you hide your face from me?...
You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;
darkness has become my only companion.”

When your problems are overwhelming you –
when you are parched and thirsty in the midst of the desert –
you may surely cry out,
“What shall I do with this people?”

c. “Strike the Rock” – The Staff from Which Blood and Water Flowed (v5-7)

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.*

What shall you do?

Notice the four things that God tells Moses to do:

“Pass on before the people” –
in other words, this will be a public event –
“taking with you some of the elders” –
those who are responsible for the grumbling –
“and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile” –
the symbol of God’s presence with Moses –
“and go.”

This is at the heart of the faithful response to our troubles.
Go.
Everyone is thirsty.
They want to stone you!

But what does God say?
Keep doing what I have called you to do.
I will do what I have promised:

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.”*

How does God respond to Israel’s grumbling?

He gives them what they wanted!
Sometimes, when we grumble and quarrel, God gives us what we want anyway!
He is a good Father.
He knows what we need – and he gives us what we need –
even when we’ve thrown temper tantrums.

Of course, he is a good Father.

He does not want us to keep throwing temper tantrums,
so he teaches us how to respond the right way!

That's why God does this before all Israel – with the elders gathered around.
Watch how God cares for his people.

Then, go and do thou likewise!

And train the people to be holy as God is holy.

Of course, some of you may be thinking –

“but it didn't work!

Israel continued to grumble – and God was not pleased with them –
and their bodies were strewn in the wilderness!”

That's what we heard in Paul's summary in 1 Corinthians 10.

If all we see here in Exodus 17 is a moral lesson on how not to grumble,
then we are missing the heart and soul of the story.

Because the heart and soul of the story focuses on the *staff* and the *rock*.

How does God provide water?

How does God provide for their needs?

“Take the staff with which you struck the Nile and go.

Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb,
and you shall strike the rock...”

If the LORD is standing on the rock at Horeb,

and you are supposed to strike the rock,

then *how* does God provide water for his people?

Strike me.

Imagine, for a moment, what must have passed through Moses' mind,
as he stood before the rock.

There, before him, the glory of the LORD stands on the Rock.

And he must dare to strike the Holy One of Israel!

He must raise his hands to bring down his staff upon the LORD his God!

It was there at Horeb many months ago that Moses had tried to escape this calling.

Now, he has returned a changed man.

Then he had trembled at the burning bush.

Now he obediently strikes his Maker.

And thereby God reveals to us the mystery of our salvation!

We are a grumbling, quarreling people.
And God knows it.
He knows that the only way we can be saved
is if he himself is struck in our place.

All the way from Egypt to Sinai, Israel will grumble and murmur.
And the LORD bears it all.
He does not strike *anyone* down for their murmuring.
No, he himself was *struck* for our sake.

All the violence of Israel's anger is focused on Moses' staff.

Why the staff?

When the staff of Moses struck the Nile,
the life-giving river turned to blood.
When the staff of Moses struck the Rock,
water poured forth so that the people might drink.

The Fathers understood what this means.
Even as "the rock was Christ,"
so also the staff is the cross.
Not just because it is made of wood.
There are lots of wooden things in the Bible that do not point directly to the cross.

But the staff of Moses is the instrument of judgment –
first in the judgment upon Egypt –
but here, most poignantly, in the judgment upon Christ – the Rock –
as God shows how *he* will take the judgment of the people upon himself.

Take the staff – the staff with which you struck the Nile –
the staff that turned the waters to blood –
and use that staff to strike *me*.

The theme of water flowing from the rock
is connected in Ezekiel with water flowing from the temple.
At the temple, there was a bronze basin – called the "sea" –
and from the sea there were bronze "water chariots"
representing the flow of water from the temple to the nations.
(If you think back to the Garden in Eden –
there were four rivers that flowed from the Garden,
from the sanctuary,
out to the four corners of the earth).

Here in Exodus 17, we have water flowing from the rock at Horeb –
at the mountain of God.

At the Feast of Tabernacles every year, the people of Israel were supposed to remember
how God provided for them in the wilderness –
how God provided water from the rock.

In John 7:37, we are told that Jesus was at the temple for the Feast of Tabernacles,
and on the last day of the feast – the great day – Jesus stood up and cried out:
“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink, whoever believes in me,
as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

He might as well have said,
“Strike me.”

But this is why we are told in John 19:34,
that when he had died on the cross,
and the soldier pierced his side with the spear,
“at once there came out blood and water.”
Ordinarily, if you stick a spear into a person who is dead,
blood comes out.
Not blood and water.

But Jesus is not just an ordinary person.
The Rock was Christ.
And so when they struck the Rock,
a river of living water flows from the heart of Jesus.

Yes, it starts out as a trickle from the cross,
but by the time John sees it again in Revelation 22,
it is “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal,
flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.”

What God had shown in a picture in Moses’ day
became flesh in Jesus.
Even as God focused all of Israel’s grumbling and quarreling upon himself
commanding Moses to strike the Rock with his staff,
even so God the Son focused all of humanity’s sin and rebellion upon himself
enduring the Cross for our sake.
He who knew no sin became sin for us.

And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah^[a] and Meribah,^[b] because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Is the LORD among us or not?

God was struck – so that Israel might live.

And in Jesus, God was struck down – so that the nations might live.

But as the second half of chapter 17 points out,
the nations are still a problem!

2. The Hands of Moses and the Hand of the LORD (17:8-16)

a. The Staff of God and the Victory of Joshua (v8-13)

⁸ Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. ⁹ So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”

The Amalekites were descended from Esau – Jacob’s brother.

When Jacob had returned from Paddan-Aram,

Esau had welcomed Jacob.

But Esau’s descendants are not like their father.

When they hear that Jacob’s descendants are coming,

they go out to fight against their cousins.

And so Moses takes the staff of God in his hand and stands on top of the hill,
and he sends out Joshua and the army.

¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹ Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. ¹² But Moses’ hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. ¹³ And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

It may seem odd.

So long as Moses holds up his hands, Israel prevails.

But when his arms grow weary, Amalek prevails.

What is going on here?

God is beginning to teach his son how to follow him.

He started with the simplest things:
Cross the Red Sea.
Eat this food.
Drink this water.
Rest on the Sabbath day.
And God provided everything.

But now, here come the Amalekites.

There was no way that Israel could defeat Pharaoh's army.
So God drowned them in the Red Sea.
God *alone* fought against Pharaoh!

But with the Amalekites, God wishes to teach his people to follow him
Israel's obedience now requires *them* to go out and fight.

God will give them the victory – through the same staff of Moses
that struck the Nile, the Red Sea, *and* the Rock.

Only God can save – but you need to believe God *and do what he says!*

And, secondarily, you need to see that Moses is *not* God.

Moses does not have the strength to win Israel's victory.

Yes, his hands must stay up –

but he needs Aaron and Hur to sustain his hands.

And it is no accident that Moses' hands hold the staff –
which symbolizes the cross.

In the first part of the chapter,

Moses *struck* the rock with his staff –

thereby inflicting judgment on the rock which was Christ.

Now, in the second part of the chapter,

Moses bears the cross until evening.

Because the way of the cross *must* characterize *all* the actions of the Christian.

This may sound strange –

given that this section is talking about war.

How can a Christian respond to opposition by going to war?!

Doesn't bearing the cross mean *suffering*?

Listen to verses 14-16:

b. "The LORD Is My Banner" (v14-16)

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of

Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”¹⁵ And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner,¹⁶ saying, “A hand upon the throne^[c] of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

How do you know whether to fight or to submit to injustice?

Well, it depends who you are in the story!

Just a few chapters ago, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt.

Pharaoh had enslaved them – and had ordered the death of their baby boys.

Did Israel fight back?

No.

That isn't what God calls us to do in that situation.

But now, a few months later, Israel fights back when Amalek attacks.

Why?

Because love of God and neighbor demands it.

Leading a slave revolt would not demonstrate love of God and neighbor,

because (as the history of slave revolts demonstrates)

the general result is *bad* for everyone.

But Moses is now the ruler of Israel.

He is obligated to protect those under his care –

and so fighting a defensive war is certainly appropriate.

Jesus is the Rock.

Therefore, he bore the cross – he took the suffering of the sufferers upon himself.

But because of his resurrection, he is now the King.

He is obligated – as King – to protect his people and deliver them.

He is doing that *now* by his Word –

in sending forth the message of the cross to all nations.

But the book of Revelation also portrays the Word of Christ

going forth as a sword from his mouth

in order to slay all his enemies.

I cannot help but think of our brothers in Egypt today.

The Christians of Egypt are once again oppressed and attacked by those who hate them.

They have little more political clout today than they did in the days of Moses.

But now they are empowered by the Gospel.

And because of the resurrection of Jesus,

they respond to the attacks with a weapon more powerful than Moses' staff.

Because we love God –

therefore we cannot help but love all those who are made in his image.
We do not want them to be destroyed by the fire of his wrath –
and so we plead with them to repent and believe the gospel!

I plead with *you* –

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof,
though they had seen my work.”

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart,
leading you to fall away from the living God.
But exhort one another every day, as long as it called today,
that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” (Heb 3:12-13)