

## The Rock of Ages and Water of Life (Exodus 17:1-7)

Please take your copy of God's holy Word and open to Ex 17.

- We're journeying with Israel in the wilderness and seeing we're not that different
  - o I feel inadequate like Moses, we can fear like Israel, many complain like them
- We've seen how every part of this OT story fits in the bigger story of the gospel.
- In this next section there's a shortage of water and the people will be short with Moses
- More than that, they'll sin and fall short of the glory of God.
  - o But by grace, judgment doesn't fall on them
  - o God provides a way to save them that shows the Savior to come.

17:1 *All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin [probably short for Sinai in that area] by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup> 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?" <sup>3</sup> 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?" <sup>4</sup> So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> And he called the name of the place Massah [Hebrew word for testing] and Meribah [Hebrew word for quarreling], because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"*

**The idea isn't just 'is the Lord BY our side,' but 'is the Lord ON our side?'**

That's the question: is God in our midst? Is He with us? Is He for us for our good?

- Some say 'it seems God is against me from what I see in my life.
- I don't feel His presence or blessing, I feel the opposite.
- I don't think a God of love would let this happen.
- Where is God when children die?' People will ask 'where was God when \_\_\_\_\_'?'
  - o God is where He's always been, the same place where He was when His own Son died for evil sin.

There is a rock to stand on here, a place of His grace.

- Even for sinful Israel stuck between a rock and a hot place with nothing to drink.
- No water in a desert is life or death situation, the issue: who/what can satisfy your thirst?

**I remember in Israel at Massada (rock fortress) how much thirst impacts in the desert**

**What did the original author Moses want God's people to take away from this event?**

**First and foremost in the original context the takeaway is: You shall not test the Lord.**

This is a serious situation and serious sin. The main point is don't test the Lord, trust the Lord.

- Note in v. 1 Israel moved to this place at God's command.
- Moses received God's messages for His people.
- Moses was the human messenger and mediator for God but they call a murderer in v. 3
- They think his plan is they'll all die, so they basically say 'you first Moses, by stoning.'

We have a saying 'don't shoot the messenger.' Moses hopes they don't stone the messenger'

**They want to put him on trial but they're really trying and testing God's patience and plan**

Testing in v. 2 looks like quarreling or grumbling in v. 3.

- Other translations have murmuring or disputing, complaining or arguing.
  - o Phil 2:14: *'do everything without complaining or arguing...'*

Paul Tripp calls this sin 'the background drone of a discontented heart.'<sup>1</sup> How's your heart?

- For Israel their quarreling in v. 2 came out in rude demanding words ('give us...')
- and attacking words in v. 3 ('why did you bring us...to die').
- Like us, their quarreling was rooted in cravings.

James 4: *'What causes...quarrels among you? [we say that sinful person or situation, but God's Word says] Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You...covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God'* (NIV).

That was Israel's problem and that's your problem and mine.

- It's not about him or her and what he/she's not giving you,
- it's about *you*, not getting what *you* want, so *you* sin.
- Or you sin to get what you want.
- Your coveting craving heart causes your quarrels.
- You fight those outside you only if you lose the fight inside.
- Desires become demands. Even good things can become gods.

Words become weapons when something 'nice to have' becomes a 'need I must have now'

Water isn't a bad thing

- but when it became the biggest thing to them, bad things start coming out of their mouths.
- And it's the same for us, from the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.

It's ok to want physical needs, peace, respect, love, etc.,

- but we have to submit it to God or it'll take the place of God.
- You don't have because you don't ask God, but you demand from others.

It's not wrong to have some things, it's wrong for anything to have us like that

They did not have water because they didn't ask God.

- It wasn't a sin to crave water, the sin was quarreling and testing God
  - o instead of calling on God and turning to God.

They turned on God's servant, not just being testy with Moses, they were testing the Lord.

- That's why it says at the end of v. 2: *Why do you test the LORD?*
- And the end of v. 7 says *'...they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"'*
- Israel wasn't just disputing, they were doubting God. Their words were godless.
- They weren't just disrespecting Moses, they were distrusting God.

Despite miraculous manna on the ground that morning and a pillar of cloud above that moment!

His mercies were new every morning but they're trying His patience and denying His presence

They felt like their back was against the wall but they forgot God parted the Red Sea into walls.

They forgot God's delivering them in the plagues and in the provision of water back at Marah.

Moses later wrote *'take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt... God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth. You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.'*

That's Dt 6:12-16, talking about them testing the Lord at Massah in Ex 17.

- They doubted if God was in their midst
- but He is as a jealous God with anger toward those who test Him in that way.

Jesus tempted in the wilderness told Satan '*You shall not test the Lord*'-it's sin, it's Satanic

How serious is testing God? Moses said in Dt 9:22 '*at Massah ... you provoked the LORD to wrath.*'

- Complaining deserves wrath and provokes the sovereign God saving and sustaining you.
- Quarreling and grumbling isn't just being hard on others
  - o it's showing a hard heart toward God.

God's voice was leading Israel, Ps 95 applies it this way: *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...*

To hear God's Word and go on grumbling, to hear His voice in the preaching of His Word

- but then to go from praising to complaining after church, is a hardening heart.
- Resisting is rebelling. Don't test God's patience.

Heb 3:7: *the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, <sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness ... <sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin ... <sup>15</sup> As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts... [4:6] ... those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts ...*

What Moses says, David says, the Spirit says. Exhort one another.

- Sin is dangerous, deceiving, hardening to evil unbelief.
- Don't receive the good news in vain. Today is the day of salvation.

We started the service in Ps 95. It starts '*come let us sing to the LORD...to the rock of our salvation.*'

### **That takes us to point #2. Look to the rock that saves**

<sup>6</sup> *Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come ...*

The people will drink instead of dying of thirst.

God is speaking here. 'Behold' means look at this.

They're about to throw rocks at Moses to end his life, but God shows a rock to save theirs!

Ex 17:6 is the first time this phrase 'the rock' is used in the Bible.

- In ch 33, Moses asks to see God's glory, and God has Moses hide *in the cleft of the rock* as the glory of His presence passes

Rock of Ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee<sup>2</sup>

On the Oregon coast there's huge rocks, they're beautiful and immovable, not going anywhere.

- One time on the beach there was sudden rain and wind blowing sand and it hurt
- I ran to the rock and there was a cleft in it that gave me shelter from the storm.
- The psalms talk like that and in hot desert sun, a rock gave shade.
- Or in a flood or fighting, a rock fortress gave high ground.

In the Bible rock meant solid foundation, strong and immovable, secure refuge, shelter in storm.

For Moses, *'the rock'* became more than a place,

- it became a personal name of God who saved and gave life.

He said in Dt 32 Israel in the desert *'rejected the Rock their Savior... You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot... God... praise the greatness of our God. He is the Rock... A faithful God...'* God's Word goes on to God's enemies in Dt 32: *'where are their gods, the rock they took refuge in... Let them [gods] give you shelter... there is no god besides... their rock is not like our Rock, as even our enemies concede'*<sup>3</sup>

Where did Moses get the idea God is the Rock, Savior, source of life, shelter, refuge, faithful?

- It seems to start in Ex 17:6 where God says to him look, *behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb.*
- Horeb is where God first appeared visibly to Moses and revealed Himself back in ch 3.
- The burning bush was transformed by God's presence and now the rock in ch 17.

Ps 114: *Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord... who turned the rock into a pool... into springs of water.*<sup>4</sup>

Rock imagery is further transformed in the psalms

- David's personal *'rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge... my stronghold... blessed be my rock... the God of my salvation'* (18:2, 46).

In contrast to Ex 17, *'let the words of my mouth... be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer'* 19:14.

**God as a rock is often linked with redeeming, saving, and our security in God**

Turn to 1 Cor 10. Israel was faint with thirst in the desert, Ps 61 *'I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower...'*

Ps 62 says God *'alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress, I shall not be greatly shaken... on God rests my salvation... my mighty rock...'*

**1 Cor 10:1** *For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea...<sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.*

- Moses called God the Rock, Paul calls Christ the Rock. Christ is God!
- Moses said Israel put God to the test, look at v. 9, Paul says:

*We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents,<sup>10</sup> nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.<sup>11</sup> Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.<sup>12</sup> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*

**Look to the Rock, Jesus. That's not allegory, that's Paul's analogy of a spiritual reality**

Don't see yourself as different or better than Israel, watch yourself lest you fall like Israel did.

- When they grumbled, they were testing Christ.
- And spiritually Christ gave Israel their drink.
- In the wilderness when they drank, Paul says *'the Rock was Christ'*!

So go back to Ex 17 but don't be unaware that Christ was there.

- In this old familiar story, there's more than meets the eye. As Peter's eyes were opened,
- he confessed Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God
- Jesus replied *'on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'*<sup>15</sup>

**The rock is who Christ is, the Messiah is God the Son, that's the foundation of the church**

This takes us to what we remember today on Palm Sunday. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, He said if believers kept their voices silent the very rocks would cry out to Jesus as the Rock.

*Hosanna* (save us) is from Ps 118 where it prophesied Israel's leaders rejecting the rock

- In the process He would become the chief cornerstone (Ps 118:22)
- Jesus quoted that repeatedly that week calling Himself a rock of stumbling for the Jews
  - o and He became the church's one foundation stone

Look to the rock that saves, not just who He is, but look at what happens to the rock in Ex 17.

<sup>5</sup> *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.*

- This staff was used in many miracles,
  - o but God highlights this: '*the staff with which you struck the Nile...*'
  - o Why that detail? It's God's judgment on Egypt and its water for their sin,
  - o turning it to blood so there's no water to drink (like Ex 17).
  - o This is the staff of judgment that struck to bring judgment and death.
  - o And remember we read at Massah they provoked God's wrath.
  - o It was a hard-hearted rebellion deserving a rod of justice.

That word *struck* was last used in Ex 12 when God struck Egypt's firstborn sons so they all die.

Later Israelites who grumble in the desert are struck dead (same word *struck* in Num 11:33)

But look to the rock that saves by being struck instead. <sup>6</sup> *Behold, I [God] 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**.*

- God the Father is in heaven, I take this as God the Son standing in some form there.
- That language '*stand before*' is used in the law of Moses for someone to be judged
  - o standing before accusers on trial.

Dt 9:17 *the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges...*

The quarreling parties were tested to receive justice or pardon

Men stand before God and His judgment, but here God says I will stand before man on the rock.

- God had tested Israel in ch 15-16, now they test God.
- They disputed whether He's really among them or not
  - o God says I'll stand before the men who have the dispute with me.
- Israel deserved to be standing in the place of the condemned
  - o and to be struck in judgment and all of them die.

But the blow of the rod of God falls on the rock instead and water flows so all of them will live!

Look to the rock that saves and takes the place of sinners who shamefully rudely scoff to Moses

Look to God the Son 'bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood

Sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah! What a Savior!'<sup>6</sup>

Look to the rock that saves, see what happens to the rock, and what flows out from the rock:

The Lord says in v. 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...

They behold in their sight the Lord standing, they look to the rock struck to give water for life.

- The elders saw a rod of judgment fall,
  - o but not on them, instead of wrath poured, water poured.
- The stroke of justice didn't bring death
  - o it brought life as they look to the rock of their salvation.

That's not reading the NT into the OT, you can find those images reading the OT prophet Isaiah

- Isa 11 promises Messiah at His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming '*shall strike the earth with the rod...shall kill the wicked*'
- ch 12 says for believers, wrath turns away and '*with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation*'
- Isa 32: *Behold, a king [Messiah] will reign in righteousness...like a hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry place, like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.*

Like the black gospel song 'Jesus is the rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm'

- Jesus says in Isa 50 '*I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out my beard*'
- Isa 53: *a man of sorrows...We esteemed him stricken, smitten of God* [same Heb word struck in Ex 17]
- Other translations have '*we regarded Him...struck down by God and afflicted...He was struck because of my people's rebellion...crushed...For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due*'<sup>7</sup>
- That Good Friday Jesus was tested and tried as a criminal and Roman soldiers struck Him with a rod
- On the cross He said '*I thirst*' before He died, and from His wounded side gushed out water and blood
- But on Easter resurrection Sunday the stone is rolled away from the empty tomb for He is risen indeed!
- After the prophecy of Jesus in Isa 53, He says in Isa 55: *Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way*'
- Don't commit the evil of forsaking the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns that hold no water<sup>8</sup>

Sinners, why do you fill yourself with what can never satisfy the thirst of your soul?

- Don't seek the mirage of sin.
- Don't try to fill your broken vessel with the empty offers of this world.
  - o Come to the water of life that Jesus offers freely!
  - o See your sin as foul and to the fountain fly, say wash me Savior or I die!
  - o Let the water and the blood from His wounded side that flowed be of sin the double cure, save from wrath and make you pure.<sup>9</sup>
  - o Look to the Rock of Ages in repentant faith!

Look to Him as your Lord, your Rock and your Redeemer, your greatest treasure

This is the gospel according to Moses. Instead of God pouring out wrath, He pours water, grace.

Ps 78:15 *He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas;*<sup>16</sup> *he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.*<sup>17</sup> *But they continued to sin...*<sup>18</sup> *They willfully put God to the test by demanding [what] they craved.*<sup>20</sup> *When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly...*<sup>35</sup> *They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer.*<sup>10</sup>

Don't keep sinning, craving, quarrelling, complaining. Look to the Rock who redeems

Ps 36 praises the Rock that His people '*drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights. For with You is the fountain of life...*' (v. 8-9 NASB).

- But if He's not your Lord and Savior, there is a lake of fire, eternal conscious torment.
- Lk 16 says hell is where unbelievers perish eternally with a worse thirst than Israel had
- They'll beg '*dip the tip of [a] finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame*'<sup>11</sup>
- But in heaven, '*never again will they thirst...he will lead them to springs of living water*' (Rev 7:16-17)

In Ex 17 Israel asks to be given water to drink. In Jn 4 Jesus said on another hot day '*If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water...Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*'

**In Jn 7:37 celebrating Exodus:** *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."<sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'* ”<sup>39</sup> *Now this he said about the Spirit...*

Then one of the last verses of the Bible: *The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. Rev 22.*

I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Behold, I freely give  
The living water, thirsty one, Stoop down, and drink, and live."  
I came to Jesus, and I drank Of that life-giving stream!  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived And now I live in Him.<sup>12</sup>

The author of *Amazing Grace*: 'let the Savior's praise resound, in Him refreshing streams are found.  
Which pardon, strength, and comfort give; and thirsty sinners drink and live'<sup>13</sup>

That's the free offer extended to you today. You can't earn it or work for

- come empty hungry and thirsty for righteousness and you'll be satisfied.
- If you need help, come up front at the end.

If you're already a believer, you're part of the Bride of Christ saying 'come.'

- Those who hear are to say to others 'come.' Extend the invitation.
- Who can you invite to come Easter Sunday?

As believers, we need to come to the Lord daily and early in His living Word, like Ps 63: *Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water* (NKJV).

- As the deer pants for the water, so our soul needs to thirst for the living God.
- If you're not drinking water daily or filling yourself with the Word daily
  - o you'll become dry and parched.

**Tomorrow morning come to His Word, and everyday as you hear it, don't harden**

Let's turn our complaining to praising like Ps 107: '*...thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them...For he satisfies the longing soul...He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground... He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water...* [what's the repeated application of Ps 107?] *Let them thank the LORD, for his steadfast love*'

**Let's thank Him in prayer and at His Table. And today, don't harden your heart**

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<sup>1</sup> Paul David Tripp, "Grumbling – A Look at a 'Little' Sin," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 18 (Winter 2000): 51.

<sup>2</sup> Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages."

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 32:15, 18, 3-4, 37-39, 32 NIV84.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 114:7-8 NIV.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 16:18 ESV.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Bliss, "Man of Sorrows What a Name!"

<sup>7</sup> HCSB, NASB95.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah 2:13.

<sup>9</sup> Toplady, "Rock of Ages."

<sup>10</sup> NIV84.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 16:23.

<sup>12</sup> William J. McRae, "Living Water An Exposition of Exodus 17:1-7," *Emmaus Journal* 8, no. 1 (1999): 63–64.

<sup>13</sup> John Newton, "The Rock was Christ."