

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

EX.17:1 And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink.

2 Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?

3 And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?

4 And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me.

5 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.

6 Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may 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 chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not

God Provides Water from a Rock

Lesson Text: Exodus 17:1-7

Related Scriptures: Exodus 15:22-26; 19:1-6; Numbers 20:1-11;
Psalm 95:6-11; John 4:7-24

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: Rephidim

GOLDEN TEXT— “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker” (Psalm 95:6).

Lesson Exposition

THE TESTS—Ex. 17:1-3

The Lord tests the people (Ex. 17:1). The Israelites that Moses led out of Egypt had already encountered challenges along the way.

Now the vast Israelite nation journeyed through the wilderness of Sin to Rephidim. 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.

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.

Our text makes it very clear, however, that the Lord Himself had led the people to this place.

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.

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.

Now He was testing them again. Would they trust the Lord to provide for them? Or would they once again complain? Had they learned their lesson, or would they continue their already established pattern? This was a very real test of their faith.

The people test the Lord (Ex. 17:2-3). The answer was not long in coming. The people began to "chide with Moses." That verb means "to 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.

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.

"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).

While it is appropriate for God to test people (cf. Gen. 22:1), it is 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.

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 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.

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. 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.

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.

THE RESPONSES—Ex. 17:4-6.

The response of Moses (Ex. 17:4).

Moses responded properly by appealing to the Lord. 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.

Moses pleaded, “What shall I do unto this people?” “Unto” is best understood here as meaning “with respect to.” Moses was utterly frustrated with the people.

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.

The response of the Lord (Ex. 17:5-6). 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 “the elders of Israel” 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.

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.

Moses’ staff is also referred to as the “rod of God” (4:20; 17:9). The staff symbolized the power, authority, and presence of the Lord.

The Lord’s promise to stand before Moses on the rock probably meant the pillar of cloud would move to that place. The rock is called

“the rock of Horeb” (vs. 6). Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai.

Moses did as the Lord instructed, and water came forth from the rock in great abundance.

THE REBUKE—Ex. 17:7

Massah and Meribah (Ex. 17:7a). The Lord graciously 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 “Massah, and Meribah.” In Hebrew, Massah means “tempting” or “testing”; Meribah means “strife” or “contention.”

Moses’ reproach (Ex. 17:7b). Moses added that the people had tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” 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. The names “Massah” and “Meribah” would act as a standing rebuke of their godless attitude.

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

QUESTIONS

1. What problem did the Israelites encounter at Rephidim?
2. Why did God lead the people into this situation?
3. How did the Israelite people respond to their circumstances?
4. In what sense did the people tempt, or test, the Lord? Why was this inappropriate?
5. What did the people accuse Moses of doing? Who were they really challenging?
6. How did Moses demonstrate his faith in the Lord?
7. What convinced Moses of the seriousness of the situation?
8. How did the Lord graciously provide for the people?
9. How would God’s provision vindicate Moses’ leadership?
10. In what way did Moses rebuke the people for their attitude?

—Jarl K. Waggoner.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. It is possible to be in a difficult situation and still be in the will of God (Ex. 17:1).
2. Prayer should be a believer's first resort in adversity (vs. 2).
3. Obey God and trust Him with your questions and fears (vs. 3).
4. Prayer is critical to anyone who leads God's people (vs. 4).
5. Believers succeed by yielding all their resources and abilities to God (vs. 5).
6. Faith in God means we trust Him even when His plan does not make sense to us (vs. 6).
7. Believers should express faith in prayer, not doubt in complaints to others (vs. 7).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why does God sometimes allow His people to go through difficult circumstances?
2. In what ways do Christians sometimes respond to adversity like unbelievers?
3. What responsibility does God place on Moses during this miracle? What does this teach us about God's provision today (cf. Ex. 17:5-6)?
4. What does the miraculous provision of water in the desert teach us about God's eternal plan for His people?
5. What similarities and differences are there between the water that Israel received and the water that God has provided us through His Son (cf. John 4:10-14)?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

Golden Text Illuminated

**“O come, let us worship and bow down:
let us kneel before the Lord our maker”
(Psalm 95:6).**

Here in Psalm 95:6 we see a call to worship the Lord through physical action. If you are physically able, bowing down before the Lord and kneeling in prayer provides a physical picture of a heavenly truth. It directly confronts us with the reality that we are lowly humans and God is our Creator and ultimate Ruler.

As the golden text implies, this exercise of worship helps us consider the fact that the Lord is our Maker. He literally made Adam and gave him the breath of life (cf. Gen. 2:7). He made each of us with similar care.

We may think that God owes us something for all the trouble and grief we have experienced. Worship forces us to learn a hard lesson: As our almighty Creator, God does not owe us—He owns us. This truth is what makes it so incredibly surprising that God wants us to know Him and have a relationship with Him through faith.

Worship, then, is a spiritual exercise through which we draw near to the God who made us, offer our thanks for all His greatness and goodness, and consider how our lives can best reflect who He is.

This week's lesson examines another example of the Lord's provision despite complaints from His people. It is clear from this lesson text and from the context of Psalm 95:6 that the Lord will provide. But how do we respond to this truth? The answer is to worship Him.

—J. A. Littler.