

Message #31**Exodus 17:1-7**

Back when I was a boy growing up there were times when I wanted something that I really had no way of getting myself. I was going to school and did not have a job, except in the summer to pick blueberries for my parents, which helped pay for school clothes. Now I played sports in High School. When you play sports you don't have much time to work a job, so when I would want something I would typically make my request known to my parents. For example, I wanted a school class ring, which I still have to this day. My parents graciously provided the means whereby I could get that class ring. They did that for every one of their children.

Now the thing that bothers me is that when I was growing up, I did not realize how much they were protecting us and providing for us. They were not only meeting our needs, but many times our wants. I told my parents I loved them on many occasions, but I don't recall ever telling my father thank you for working and providing for me. I regret that! Because I have come to understand how much he did for us now, but now he is with the Lord.

The problem with Israel is that she has never come to realize how much God has done for her. Just days after parting the Red Sea, the people of this nation were complaining against Moses and against God. They were not thankful people and they were not trusting people. God used a series of episodes in her history to try to bring her to the place where she would finally realize He is the one caring for her. In fact, this is the point here.

This is the lesson Israel needed to learn and so do we:

WHEN WE ARE FOLLOWING THE LEADING OF GOD, WE WILL SOMETIMES EXPERIENCE THINGS THAT WILL FORCE US TO PRAY TO GOD AND TRUST GOD SO THAT WE WILL LEARN HE IS THE ONE WHO IS PROTECTING US AND PROVIDING FOR US; AND ISRAEL IS AN EXAMPLE OF TOTAL FAILURE.

Don't be fooled into thinking we would never be as foolish as Israel, because frankly we are. In many ways, the story of God's nation is the story of God's individual. There are five realities to see:

REALITY #1 – God leads Israel through the wilderness. 17:1

Israel was in the Sinai Peninsula in the wilderness of Sin and they moved in "stages" through it. What that means is that they did not just pack up and make one major trip to Mount Sinai; they moved and camped at various places.

The text said that they moved in accordance with the "**command of the LORD.**" God would literally tell them how long to stay in a place and when to move from a place. They apparently stayed in a spot for several days and even weeks and then when God told them to move, they moved. They truly were following the leading of God.

Now it is clear from this verse that they came to a place to camp at Rephidim. The word “Rephidim” is a Hebrew word that means “resting places.” This was clearly the leading of God. God was leading them to various resting places, and we suspect one reason He did was to see whether or not they had learned to trust Him and depend on Him. Scholars believe the actual location of this spot is a place that does have water in it except in the summer months when water dries up.

When we lived out west, in the spring there would be streams of water that would flow down out of the mountains, but when summer came the springs stopped. There is a canyon in Idaho, Mike Spencer Canyon that I scouted one spring as I was hunting black bear. I found a beautiful little spot with a stream that trickled down and I thought this is a beautiful spot to find elk. In fact, I planned to hike in to this spot and pitch a tent not far from that stream. Well, in the summer I went back and was shocked to see there was no water there. There was no stream. You could actually see the channel where the water had been, but there was no water.

That is probably what Israel was facing at Rephidim. She was there in summer time and had no water, which is exactly why God led her there.

REALITY #2 – Israel grumbles against Moses and quarrels with Moses. **17:2-3**

Here we go again. Israel does not like where God has led her because she cannot see any physical drinking water. She has completely forgotten about the Word of God and the work of God.

They had already been through this and they saw God wonderfully supply their needs. You would think that they would have all learned their lesson. After they had crossed the Red Sea, they came to a place called Marah (**15:23**) and there was no good, fresh water to drink. We may recall that the people started grumbling and God had Moses throw some tree into the water and it became good water (**15:26**). God entered into a legal pact with Israel and said as long as you obey Me and follow Me, I will take care of you and provide for you (**15:26**). **Israel had completely forgotten about the promises of God and the provisions of God.**

So here we are again. Israel needs water. You would have thought they would say well, God provided it before and He will provide it again. But this is another test Israel will fail.

God will give His people many opportunities to get it right. No matter what the issue, God will present multiple opportunities to learn the lesson. In Israel’s case, she failed every time, all the time.

Warren Wiersbe said, “every difficulty God permits us to encounter will become either a test that can make us better or a temptation that can make us worse” (*Be Delivered*, p. 104). It will be our response that will determine which it will be.

Now the text says, “the people quarreled with Moses.” The word “quarrel” in Hebrew is one that can mean to argue and debate, but it also carries with it the idea of protesting and bringing a charge against someone.

What this word means is that the people got into a very heated argument with Moses and were making serious allegations, probably about where he had led them. This was a very tense and heated interchange between Moses and the people. They wanted water; they did not have water and they were charging Moses.

The Israelites had a faith in God that said unless we can see it right now, we don’t believe it and we won’t believe it. Now let’s remember Paul in I Corinthians 10; these things are given as examples to us because we are just like Israel. We see God provide things and do good things for us time and time again and then something comes up and we doubt God and fret and start grumbling and stop trusting.

In **verse 2**, Moses said, “why are you quarreling with me?” “Why do you test the LORD?” He is reminding the Israelites that again they have fallen into the same rut in that they are complaining against God because Moses was simply following the direction of God.

Now by this point in their relationship with God, Israel should have known God never has let us down. When we were backed up against the Red Sea, God delivered us. When we were without food, God provided for us. They should have reasoned now that we are out of water we know God will take care of that, too.

But that is not how these people responded. According to **verse 3**, they started making up a crazy scenario that Moses had brought them out of Egypt to kill them and their children and their livestock with thirst. How bizarre is that? Do you really believe God delivered Israel from Egypt to take them to the wilderness so they could all die of thirst? This is theological lunacy.

When people are out of fellowship with God, they typically end up saying and doing things that do not make anything better. In fact, they make things worse.

God is leading these people to a land flowing with milk and honey, but before He would take them into that land, they needed to learn an important lesson; we can always depend on God.

Before God pours out His ultimate blessings on His people, He wants them to learn this very important lesson.

REALITY #3 – Moses cries out to God. **17:4**

Sometimes leaders are forced into situations in which the only thing they can do is cry out to God. Moses has nowhere else to turn. His only recourse is to cry out to God.

Now Moses was not the kind of man to embellish the truth. So when he says to the Lord there is a danger here of me being “stoned,” you can be certain that was, in fact, a real possible threat. Moses did not know what to do. He never wanted this job in the first place and now that he had it, he is leading a group of people who are criticizing, complaining and threatening him.

Stoning was the normal way people who were a threat were killed. Even recognized leaders were not above being stoned (Num. 14:10; I Sam. 30:6; John 8:59; Acts 5:26; 7:58; 14:19). Stoning was a legitimate form of legal punishment. Moses truly believed that he was on the verge of being stoned.

The people charged him with trying to starve them to death and now they were charging him with trying to kill them by thirst. Moses was in a real bind and people were in a panic and Moses needed God’s help and so he did exactly what he should do—he cried out to God.

Now in some respects, Moses’ emotions are getting the best of him, just as Israel’s emotions are getting the best of them. **Both have temporarily forgotten the protection of God and both have temporarily forgotten the provisions of God.**

To not trust in God is a form of rebellion and this lack of trust is a rebellion that is remembered in all of Scripture pertaining to Israel (Num. 20:13, 24; 27:14; Deut. 6:16; 9:22; 33:8; Ps. 81:7; 95:8; 106:32), but also pertaining to Moses and Aaron (Num. 27:14; 20:24; Deut. 32:51; Ps. 106:32).

We may remember that God told Moses that he would lead the people of Israel back to a specific spot to worship Him (Ex. 3:12). Moses was not back to that spot yet and he should have realized these people can threaten me all they want, but the fact is they cannot kill me because God is leading me. But even though this is a lapse of faith in Moses, he is doing the right thing by crying out to God.

REALITY #4 – God tells Moses exactly what he should do. **17:5-6**

God had a plan for Moses and His Word reveals it. Two things critical to determining the will of God—prayer and God’s Word:

Action #1 - Moses is to pass before the people. **17:5a**

The language means that Moses is to take off walking by the people and in front of the people. Moses needed to be at the head of the people. God wanted these people to realize “this is My man.”

Action #2 - Moses is to take some of the elders of Israel with him. **17:5b**

What is stressed here is that some of the elders were to go with him, obviously not all of the elders. These elders would be witnesses of what God would do and would be able to tell the people about the great provisions of God.

Action #3 - Moses is to take his staff in his hand. **17:5c**

This is the same staff that was used to strike the Nile and it became blood. Now it would strike a rock and it would become water. That staff in the hands of Moses was able, by the power of God, to do some great things.

Action #4 - God will stand before Moses on the rock at Horeb. **17:6a**

The name Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai (Ex. 3:1). There are a large number of rocks located at the base of this mountain, but there was obviously a special rock there that featured the presence of God that Moses was to strike.

Action #5 - Moses is to strike the rock and water will come out and the people may drink. **17:6b**

God was about to perform another amazing miracle. Moses was to strike the rock, which was not the normal place one would find water and it would yield so much water that all the men, women, children and livestock could drink to their heart's content.

So these people who had seen God send plagues, part a sea, destroy enemies, provide food and water were about to see another spectacular provision of God.

At the end of **verse 6**, Moses did so in the sight of the elders and every one of those elders could testify as to what they saw God do. **Think for a moment about the amazing grace of God. His people are grumbling and complaining and disbelieving and God graciously provides for His people anyway.**

There is no question that, according to Paul, this event concerning the rock is illustrative of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 10:4). He is the rock that was struck and just as this rock was struck for unworthy people, so was He. The end result of striking the rock was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as a result of accomplished redemption so that people would not perish.

Dr. C. I. Scofield said this episode in Exodus is illustrative of the entire life under grace (Ex. 17:6 note). The rock is struck for unworthy people. The life that is offered is free, unearned, abundant, near and available. All one must do to be saved from death is reach out by faith and partake of the grace that is offered.

REALITY #5 – Moses names the location Massah and Meribah. **17:7**

The Hebrew word “Massah” means testing, trial, temptation. The Hebrew word “Meribah” means protest, quarrel, contention and strife. Why did Moses use two names? Probably the answer is because Moses is recognizing the depth of the rebellion of the nation Israel. Time and time again God provided for Israel in pure grace, and time and time again she protested against the provision. Think for a moment about the contention and strife that she has had with Jesus Christ for over 2000 years. God provided for her salvation and she totally rejects it. These Israelites were beginning to develop a pattern of not trusting God. They were developing a pattern of failing tests and contending against God. This attitude is still operative and never was that more evidenced than when Jesus Christ came to Israel as her King/Savior.

Israel’s track record is one of not submitting to God. Dr. Wiersbe said, “on the map of our lives how many places should be named ‘Testing and Quarreling?’” (*Ibid.*, p. 106).