

Sermon: That Rock was Christ Exodus 17:1-7

Preached by James R Hamilton on 27 June 2010 at Fole Reformed Evangelical Chapel

Our title for this morning is 'That Rock was Christ' and it's worth reminding ourselves that that is the theme of the entire Bible. "*Search the Scriptures*" Jesus said to the Jews "*for they testify of me*"

1Corinthians 10:3 and following directly testify to this and you'll find that phrase there in chapter 10, "*that rock was Christ*".

Chapter 17, as chapter 16 before it, begins with the word "AND" which of course connects the words you are reading with the previous. (Can I remind you that the chapter divisions are not in the original and are not inspired.) The "and" here shows that this follows hot on the heels of the previous events of chapter 16 – the murmuring, the complaining, the provision of bread from heaven – and these events are mostly repeated in chapter 17. It emphasises the enormity of the actions of many of the people of Israel but it also magnifies the grace, patience and longsuffering of the Lord.

We see here that many of the people of Israel have learnt absolutely nothing following the previous works of the Lord. You remember they murmured against Moses and Aaron in chapter 16 and they were told that what they were doing in reality was complaining and bringing charges against God himself. They were questioning his ability

In Psalm 78:17 it explicitly tells us this. *And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?*

Bring to mind all the might and power that they had already experienced at the hands of God and so, so soon after we find them questioning Him. He had provided bread from heaven but here was another trial. The purpose of these trials was to wean the people of Israel off the things of the earth and to bring them to that place of complete and utter dependence on God. This was the point of taking them through the wilderness because there was nothing there, absolutely no human resource to help them. It was to bring them to that place of trusting only in Him.

The Attitude of the People

Rephidim is also known as Massah which means 'temptation' and Meribah which means 'strife'. All three names are found throughout Scripture but they all refer to the same place. Rephidim is termed Massah and Meribah because of the events that took place there.

They are about a day's journey from Mount Sinai where the Law was finally issued to them but note in verse 1 that they are led here deliberately at the Lord's command. It was not Moses nor Aaron but the commandment of God that led Israel to this place.

There's no water – none! There's not even bitter water that can be made sweet – none whatsoever. And what we now see manifested even more among them is this spirit of unbelief and rebellion against God. There's not an ounce of thankfulness (Romans 1... *neither were thankful*..) but only an attitude of ingratitude here in verses 1 and 2.

Israel is moving forward in the purposes of God for them as a nation. They have been delivered out of slavery – out of the hands of the Egyptians. They have been told that they must undertake this journey through the wilderness and that God will take them to the Promised Land. He has given them a hope and a future and He has promised and prepared a future for them. Are they grateful? Are there any expressions of gratitude from them? On the contrary, it seems that the slightest disturbance to their lifestyle – something they don't have or something not going their way – means they start expressing bitter criticism against their leaders Moses and Aaron. There isn't a single hint of thankfulness to Moses recorded.

Moses is the man who bears the responsibility for all 2 million of them. That's a burden to carry is it not? He's in exactly the same position as they are. He doesn't have a secret supply of bread and water. But there's never, never an expression of thankfulness or gratitude towards him.

One commentator says that this reveals a very low spirituality and a wrong attitude to God. Beloved that is the understatement of the year!

Turn, if you will, to Deuteronomy 6:16 *Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah* and then to chapter 9:22 *And at Taberah, and at Massah, and at Kibrothhattaavah, ye provoked the LORD to wrath.*

It's not explicitly said so here in chapter 17 of Exodus but the wrath of God burned towards them because of their unbelief and their attitude of ingratitude and impatience. This is serious and the seriousness of it is highlighted by these incidents being used as illustrations in the New Testament.

1Corinthians 10 *Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.* You need to read the whole chapter.

Furthermore in Hebrews where they are being tempted to turn from the Lord just because they are enduring a little mockery. Some perhaps were losing their jobs because they worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ but they hadn't suffered to the extent of shedding their blood yet.

"You get this little bit of persecution" says Paul *"and you're thinking of abandoning God and going back to your synagogues and to your Judaism"*.

He warns them here in chapter 3 *Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses,*

Well I'm not going to read the whole chapter to you – again read it and see the warnings given there.

Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.

Forty years these people witnessed signs and wonders at the hands of God and they went on and on proving and tempting the Lord!

I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest. (Ps95:11)

That's the seriousness of the situation here. Their impatience, their ingratitude, their unbelief is slander not just against Moses but against God. They are calling God a liar. They are saying in effect that although God has given them all these promises they don't believe He is able to do them. *"Where is this Promised Land? We want it now!"*

Isn't this an attitude we see revealed in the visible church in our own day? It's an attitude of impatience that just point blank refuses to wait on the Lord. We are indeed living in a day of small things and Scripture tells us we are not to despise the day of small things as ultimately it is all in the providence of God. If there is an abundance of salvation then that's God's doing and that's wonderful but there are periods in history when the church goes through a drought. And that is what we are in today – like it or not that's what we've got. However we are still to be faithful witnesses to God amidst that day of small things.

It's this impatience that is manifested when people say that they will turn to other things. We'll turn away from the worship of God and we'll do things our way. We'll take on board these gimmicks. We'll drink in some of

the world, make ourselves more acceptable to it and bring them in by any and all means. They call themselves reformed but they are Arminian at heart. They show it clearly by their practices, their refusal to continue faithfully preaching the Word of God as He has told us to do and to wait on Him for the increase.

God the Father has promised his Son a certain number of people for His own kingdom (Psalm 2 *Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*) He has promised us that His word shall not return void, it shall accomplish the purpose for which He sends it forth. Our place is to carry on faithfully and patiently ministering the Word of God and waiting on Him with none of this attitude of *"I want it and I want it now!"*

There's another manifestation of this attitude and it's been demonstrated through the charismatic explosion of the last 100 years. You could call it, I think, an over-reached eschatology - triumphalism. You've heard it I'm sure *"No Christian should be sick, no Christian should be wanting for anything. You should have it all and you should have it all now."* Beloved God has not promised that to anyone in his Word. He has not promised us perfect health or freedom from trial. In fact we are told quite plainly the very opposite in Scripture.

We are in fact like Israel travelling through the wilderness, a place of trial and difficulty, quite severe trial and difficulty at times. There are scorpions, there are briars, there are thorns, there are all kinds of dangers to be faced and to be overcome. The freedom from sickness, sin, trial, trouble and affliction is reserved for heaven and heaven alone.

So this attitude of we want it and we want it now is wickedness! They may want to travel through this wilderness without cost and without discipline but such a lifestyle would simply make you flabby morally and spiritually.

Remember that all through the history of redemption and even today through the ministry of God's Word, God has a double purpose being worked out. That is both the hardening of the reprobate and the salvation of the elect. God is working in the remnant according to his election by grace so that they will not be morally or spiritually flabby. He is weaning them from the things of the earth and causing them to rely more and more upon Him.

Attitude of Independence

There is an attitude of independence here too in verses 1 and 2. There is no thought of prayer. No one suggests to Moses that they call a prayer meeting. It's a crisis isn't it? You can call a prayer meeting anytime - 4.00 am if you're faced with a crisis.

Isn't that the thing to do instead of complaining about why God is doing this? But there's no thought of that here, no demand for Moses to lead them to the Throne of Grace. They're not dying of thirst - it's just that the water has run out. *"Let us pray Moses and see what God will do in this crisis"* - there's none of that. They leave it to Moses. *"Leave it to Moses, he's the minister, isn't that what we pay him for?"*

Such people manifest an attitude of independence from God and part of the reason they are in the state they are in is because they have no personal prayer life. If people don't attend prayer meetings and don't pray in prayer meetings it's normally because there is no personal prayer life. They are, you see, not inclined to disciplined service and their attitude is that they can do it alone. *"We can get to the Promised Land on our own"*. Then they wonder why there is so little of the power of God in their lives, why they have so little assurance. It's because they are never before the Throne of Grace!

How people can come to a prayer meeting and keep their mouths shut is beyond my comprehension. Wild horses shouldn't be able to hold you back. Without it there's no fellowship. Fellowship isn't us talking about the things we did during the week. Fellowship is partnership in faith, the prayer life of the church. It's something that Christians do together. That's why there are no barrier in our prayers; it's a common sharing.

But these people, they are on the own with an attitude of independence, impatience and ingratitude.

The Sin of the People

Notice in verse 2 the insolence of these words towards Moses, they chided with him...*Give us water that we may drink*. What they are really asking is why if God is so powerful does he not deliver them to the Promised Land now? Why do they have to go through all this stuff?

It's the parable of the sower revisited. Jesus said that people come and profess faith and seem to be filled with joy and happiness. But along comes some sort of trial and where are they? They're straight out of the door – gone! They expected God to deliver them to the Promised Land straight away. They didn't expect to have to face mockery or persecution, to have to wait or keep asking for things, they wanted it and they wanted it now!

It's that same attitude again isn't it? *"If your God is so powerful Moses why doesn't he deliver us into the Promised Land now with no unpleasantness and no trials - why?"* We come to this later on but it's the same temptation that the Son of God faced when He was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert.

Luke 4 *And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God (there's no argument about that, we know that. Everyone has just heard God His Father speaking to Him saying this is My beloved Son. It's not 'if' but 'since' you are the Son of God) command this stone that it be made bread.*

It's back to the wilderness again. If God is so great and God is so powerful why have you been starving these 40 days and 40 nights? Why doesn't God provide you with bread? *And Jesus answered him and said that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God.*

Then the devil tries another ploy and *taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it.*

Jesus is going to rule all the nations - of that there is no doubt at all – and Satan already knows it. So what is the temptation? Well it's this attitude again isn't it? *"You can have it all now without having to go through the trials and tribulations. You don't have to go to the Cross; you don't have to endure that suffering. Bow down and worship me and you can have it NOW!"*

What does Jesus answer? *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

Then of course he takes Jesus up to the pinnacle of the temple *"and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee.*

The devil wants Him to tempt God again by suggesting that it would be a magnificent display of power for Jesus to jump and not be hurt. You can almost hear him *"Jump Jesus! Jump! Look at all the people in the temple courts below. What a miraculous sign this will be, they'll all want to follow you." JUMP!*

Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God!

Jesus succeeded where Israel failed in the wilderness. Through faith in God's Word He overcame the temptations and succeeded in the midst of the trials. He simply and plainly trusted himself to what God had spoken.

If God is never to work another miracle in the universe for as long as history and eternity lasts, He will still be God and his Word will still be truth. The highest reach of faith is simply to rest in his Word and his Word alone.

It's a heart condition we see here amongst these people and they, in their sin, are completely turned in on themselves. In this nation of 2 million people there is only a remnant whose hearts have been changed. The truth of the matter is that the hearts of most of them are still in Egypt. Even though they are on the way to the Promised Land, they simply don't want to be in the wilderness. It's the flesh pots of Egypt that they want to be enjoying.

They can't even think ahead to the Promised Land and that is what worries me in the church today. I see Christians living for this world with no thought of heaven and, it appears, no desire for heaven. Nobody should want to die – that's a psychological aberration. But there is a sense in which Christians should be focusing and meditating on heaven and its glory. So that when it's our turn to depart this world, the things of this world should be nothing to us and we can let go the anchor and sail heavenward with some ease because our belief is that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord and to die is gain.

When I see a Christian church that is married to this world I do wonder if this is just the same heart condition that we are talking about this morning. And these people will never be satisfied in the desert because they are always lusting after something else. They want the wine, they want the pizzas, they want the spice of Egypt...they want the rock and roll music! How can they ever be satisfied travelling with God's people through this wilderness?

The heart condition of the Israelites is the same unregenerate heart condition that you see in the world today. Circumcised in the flesh they look like believers, talk like believers and dress like believers but they have uncircumcised hearts.

The language of the murmuring against Moses is frightening - *Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?* - wicked and threatening.

Do remember that although the majority murmured there were a few who prayed. Psalm 105:40 and following, Hebrews 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:5. Please read Hebrews 3 and 1 Corinthians 10 before the day is out.

The rebellion that is in their hearts means that there is no true faith there. It's a refusal to trust God and his Word. Do you see the question in verse 7? *Is the LORD among us, or not?* What wickedness to ask such a question as that.

The belief that prosperity is a sign that God is with you is prevalent in the church today Beloved prosperity is never a sign that the Lord is with us...new car, jobs going well, healthy bank balance – the Lord is with us. Then if the job goes or the bank balance falls do we wonder if the Lord is really with us? Does what we do possess or don't possess have any bearing on the promises of God – does it negate any of them?

These Israelites have been the same all through their history – they were the same in Jesus' day. They demanded signs, signs and more signs. *"Show us a sign and we'll believe"*. This generation had seen more signs and wonders than anyone and still they didn't believe! So when someone comes to you and tells you that what we need today is more miracles then you can tell them with some assurance that miracles will not cause people to believe only sovereign grace will do that.

We've looked at their heart condition and their heart rebellion and now we come to their heart hatred – for God!

Oh it was expressed towards Moses but the sum of the commandments Jesus tells us is love for God and love for your neighbour as yourself. We love our neighbour for God's sake and these people hated Moses for God's sake. The presence of God to these people was unavoidable – the glory, the cloud – they were in no need of further proof or evidence. What they wanted was for there to be no God and just as your nation today they went into denial. Their ingrained hatred and pride made them want a God – but a God who would be a lackey to them. They wanted a genie in a bottle who popped out when they decided they needed him and disappeared when they wanted to carry on with their sinful living.

If you read Romans 3:10 and following you will see that this is the natural state of all men who are born into this world. Romans 8:7 too...*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God* Grace alone can change the human heart nothing else.

In verses 4 through 7 we have the Sign of the Rock

I wonder if any of them ever gave a thought to what would happen if Moses cracked under this pressure. You can see real fear here in verse 4....*they be almost ready to stone me.*

I know that there will be young ministers ministering in the pulpit this very day who will be doing so in fear of their congregations. That is real wickedness. I am in a unique position in terms of my age and in terms of my independence in financial support but for most young ministers with families, this is their living. They know full well that if they upset certain people in the congregation then they are out of a job.

There are some congregations that put their ministers under so much pressure. I once sat down to lunch at a conference I attended next to another gentleman who I hope I was able to minister to. Beloved I've never seen the like in my life – his mind was broken. And it was his own congregation that had done that to him. His mind was broken and it was obvious he would never be the same again but do you know what, wonder of wonders; he expressed nothing but love for them.

Jesus of course was attacked by Satan through his friend Peter when seeking to turn him away from God's appointed and costly obedience said (Matt 16:22) *Lord: this shall not be unto thee.*

Get thee behind me, Satan.

Moses despaired of the people and in fact he did crack later on didn't he? But the important thing here is that God, as so often he does, shows extreme longsuffering. See God's patience here - *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 -* His patience even when they are stupid, rebellious and disaffected.

God knows the privations they suffered in Egypt, the humiliations they had to endure and it's left many of them with warped attitudes. Moses on the other hand grew up with a silver spoon in his mouth. He grew up in an evangelical home and was taught evangelical theology on his mother's knee. Then he was sent to an Egyptian university which was the best education that the world could buy in those days. So of course more was expected of Moses. Patience – it's never been easy – but God understood.

Do you remember the young lady D who I told you about last week – on the streets and broken. What would we think if she came amongst us? Let's be honest, her language, her clothes, her body odour, everything would offend. But would we have the grace to love somebody like that? Could we be patient for years, as if it was given to her it would surely take years for God's grace and our grace to bring her to point where God would want her to be?

There had to be witnesses. This wasn't to be put down to a natural occurrence. Moses was to take the rod that God gave back to him at the burning bush because the people were to understand that Moses stood in God's authority and in God's place. He's God's minister - remember that when you are dealing with God's officers.

The rock is an Old Testament type of Jesus (1Corinthians 10 again makes that clear) – *that rock was Christ.*

It is a testimony too to the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Deut 32:15 we have reference there to “the rock” – “Jehovah”. Jesus was the rock as we have just seen and in Psalm 95:1 Jehovah is “the rock”. Jesus is the rock – Jehovah is the rock – Jesus is the LORD, he is Jehovah-Jesus. He is God.

It speaks too of a spiritual rock. Christ followed them all through the wilderness making the rocks a source of water for them. The sign of the rock, like all the other signs, pointed to Jesus - the spiritual rock, the spiritual bread, the spiritual water. But only in faith could you see that. Only those with the reality of faith were built up and brought to a stronger faith and assurance. The rock that was smitten is Christ just as Christ was smitten by God's justice on the cross in order that life might be poured down upon us.

This was God's provision - a multitude of signs – showing the enormity of their unbelief. But to faith it was of spiritual significance - another revelation from heaven, another shaft of light. It was another pointer towards Messiah, the saviour who would come.

The whole 2 million of Israel drank. Some drank to commendation but others to condemnation because in their denial, their unbelief, their rebellion and their hatred, their uncircumcised hearts could see nothing but physical water.

Oh God gave them their request – He gave them water but that could not cure their unbelief. They continued to hate the Lord. They continued not to believe.

So I hope I have made my point about revelation – the signs, the wonders, the miracles – it is so important. We have the miracle-mongers in force amongst us today. Refer to them as signs not miracles as they were all signs pointing to Christ. They were given under the Old Testament dispensation and they were necessary then.

In our Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 7 it is put quite clearly in section 5

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, (that's under the old dispensation) and in the time of the gospel: (law – gospel – two different) under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances (May I add even signs) delivered to the people of the Jews, all (signs that is) fore-signifying Christ to come: which were, for that time, sufficient (there was enough in all these signs, these types and shadows) and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called, the Old Testament

Now we speak of 2 covenants but there aren't 2 covenants there is only one covenant of Grace. If you read Hebrews you get the recurring word 'better' – a better covenant. It's a better covenant in that it's administered in a different way but there is still only one covenant of grace. Continuing into section 6

Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory; yet, in them, it is held forth in more fulness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.

The point being here that under the new dispensation that we are now in we have a better covenant, fuller, clearer greater evidence and spiritual efficacy than all these signs performed for Israel.

We have a more sure and certain testimony so how much more responsibility and culpability does that put on us and especially on those who do not believe?

Amen