

# EXODUS

## Chapter 17

### *Water From the Rock*

**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. 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?” 4 So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” 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. 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 of Israel. 7 And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”**

**17:1** *moved on...by stages.* For a list of specific sites see Nu 33:12–14. (CSB)

*Rephidim.* Probably either the Wadi Refayid or the Wadi Feiran, both near Jebel Musa in southern Sinai. (CSB)

Rephidim, the next camping place of the Israelites reported in Exodus after the Desert of Sin, was not far from Mount Sinai. The rock which Moses struck there to get water was “at Horeb.” Horeb, was the mountain range where Moses had tended sheep for his father-in-law Jethro. Mount Sinai was one of the peaks in this Horeb mountain range. After the experience of receiving manna and quail in the Desert of Sin the Israelites camped at two other places before reaching Rephidim. These two places, Dophkah and Alush, were mentioned by Moses later when he gave a list of all the places where Israel camped, as we read in Numbers 33:12, 13. (PBC)

Nothing of special note seems to have happened at Dophkah and Alush, but we call attention to this in order to appreciate better the situation at Rephidim. Israel has been on the move again for several days. The hills are getting higher, the valleys narrower and full of huge rocks, and springs of water are nowhere to be found. (PBC)

**17:2** *quarreled with Moses* – This time the Israelites not only complain. The argue with Moses and even threaten to stone home. (PBC)

test *the LORD.* Israel fails the Lord’s testing of her (see 16:4) by putting the Lord to the test. (CSB)

Despite His promise of sustenance (16:4), the people accused God of abandoning them. (TLSB)

The second question was the explanation of the first, for in attacking Moses the people rebelled against the Lord and provoked Him to anger. (Kretzmann)

**17:3** *grumbled*. During their desert wanderings, the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron whenever they faced a crisis (see 16:2; 17:3; Nu 14:2; 16:11, 41). In reality, however, they were grumbling “against the LORD” (16:8). Paul warns us not to follow their example (see 1Co 10:10). (CSB)

*children and livestock* – Herders were nearly as concerned for their animals as for their families. (TLSB)

**17:4** *this people*. The same note of distance and alienation (“these people” instead of “my people”) in such situations is found often in the prophets (see, e.g., Isa 6:9; Hag 1:2). (CSB)

Reflecting their estrangement, Moses did not call them “my people” or “Your people.” (TLSB)

*stone me* – They held Moses responsible for the impending ruin, and assumed such an ugly attitude as to cause Moses to fear the worst. (Kretzmann)

The Israelites are in rebellion against Moses and, by extension, God. (TLSB)

**17:5** *the staff* – the shepherd’s staff which was his symbol of authority, take in thine hand and go. The solemn departure of Moses and the elders from the camp was to draw the attention of the entire army to their actions. (Kretzmann)

This staff was a symbol of God’s authority. (TLSB)

**17:6** *I will stand there ... on by the rock*. Paul may have had this incident in mind when he spoke of Christ as “the spiritual rock that accompanied” Israel (see 1Co 10:4; see also Heb 11:24–26). (CSB)

God assured Moses of His presence and definitely promised him a miracle. (Kretzmann)

*Strike the rock, and water will come out*. The event was later celebrated by Israel’s hymn writers and prophets (see Ps 78:15–16, 20; 105:41; 114:8; Isa 48:21). (CSB)

Ambrose : “for them water flowed from the rock, for you Blood flowed from Christ; water satisfied them for a time, the Blood satiates you for eternity... You after drinking will be beyond the power of thirsting; that was in a shadow, this is in truth.” (TLSB)

Luther: “faith is the prerequisite before everything. If one has faith, all other things gush forth from it, like water from the rock and stone.” (TLSB)

Luther: “ St Paul does not say that the rock which Moses struck is Christ. His words say very plainly: They ate of the same spiritual food of which we eat, and they drank of the same spiritual drink of which we drink, and so forth... He does not say that Christ is signified by, but that Christ himself actually is, the spiritual Rock – and one signified by that physical rock. That is why Paul was careful to add the word ‘spiritual’ to the word ‘Rock,’ so that no one could ever construe it to mean that physical rock. Moreover, he says it was a Rock which was yet to come, from which they drank spiritually.” (TLSB)

*in sight of the elders* – They were witnesses to the miracle and could testify before the people as to the manner in which water had been produced. (Kretzmann)

**17:7** *Massah and Meribah*. Heb 3:7–8, 15 (quoting Ps 95:7–8) gives the meaning “testing” for Massah and “rebellion” for Meribah. Another Meribah, where a similar incident occurred near Kadesh Barnea, is referred to in Nu 20:13, 24; 27:14; Dt 32:51; 33:8; Ps 81:7; 106:32; Eze 47:19; 48:28. (CSB)

*Is the LORD among us or not?* The Lord shows them plainly that He is present with them. They have not yet learned to live by faith. (TLSB)

So that had been their real transgression, the doubts as to the presence of the Lord with their army, the pillar of cloud and of fire apparently not being sufficient any more to uphold their faith. The events here narrated were considered an example of warning throughout the time of the Old Testament as well as in the New, Ps. 95, 8; Heb. 4, 9. And as it was Christ who journeyed with His people at that time and strengthened the faith of those who noted His presence in the miracle, so it is He who gives us at all times the true spiritual water to quench the thirst of our souls. (Kretzmann)

**17:1–7** When Israel runs out of water, they grumble instead of turning to God, their Rock, for help. God in His graciousness does not deal with them according to their folly but furnishes the water they desperately need. He was stricken Himself for what they deserve. Christ Jesus is the Rock of Israel and our Rock of salvation. • O Lord, our Rock, grant us the insight of faith, and give us the stability, refuge, and living water that we need. Amen. (TLSB)

#### *Israel Defeats Amalek*

**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.” 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. 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 of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”**

**17:8** *Amalekites.* A nomadic tribe, descended from Esau (Gn. 35:12, 16). Israel may have been camped near or between Wadi Reyayid and Wadi Feiran, and Amalek would not want then to use either oasis. (TLSB)

The Amalekites were descendants of Amalek, a grandson of Esau as Gen. 36:12 tells us. In this story we see that they were the first nation to attack God's people after they left Egypt. (PBC)

**17:9** *Joshua.* The name given by Moses to Hoshea son of Nun (see Nu 13:16). “Hoshea” means “salvation,” while “Joshua” means “The LORD saves.” The Greek form of the name Joshua is the same as that of the name Jesus, for the meaning of which see NIV text note on Mt 1:21. Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim (Nu 13:8), one of the most powerful of the 12 tribes. (CSB)

*fight the Amalekites.* Joshua's military prowess uniquely suited him to be the conqueror of Canaan 40 years later, while his faith in God and loyalty to Moses suited him to be Moses' “aide” (24:13; 33:11) and successor (see Dt 1:38; 3:28; 31:14; 34:9; Jos 1:5). (CSB)

Joshua chose men to lead into battle, but this succeeded only as God will it. (TLSB)

**17:10** *Hur.* Perhaps the same Hur who was the son of Caleb and the grandfather of Bezalel (see 1Ch 2:19–20), one of the builders of the tabernacle (see 31:2–5). (CSB)

**17:11** *held up his hand.* A symbol of appeal to God for help and enablement. (CSB)

Moses held his hands spread out in prayer, appealing to God for help. Cyprian: “By this sign of the cross also Amalek was conquered by Jesus (Joshua) through Moses” (ANF 5:524). (TLSB)

**17:12** *Aaron and Hur held his hands up* - They assisted Moses setting an example for believers to support their leaders in prayer. (TLSB)

**17:14** *Write.* See 24:4; 34:27–28; Nu 33:2; Dt 28:58; 29:20, 21, 27; 30:10; 31:9, 19, 22, 24. (CSB)

*scroll.* A long strip of leather or papyrus on which scribes wrote in columns (see Jer 36:23) with pen (see Isa 8:1) and ink (see Jer 36:18), sometimes on both sides (see Eze 2:10; Rev 5:1). After being rolled up, a scroll was often sealed (see Isa 29:11; Da 12:4; Rev 5:1–2, 5, 9) to protect its contents. Scrolls were of various sizes (see Isa 8:1; Rev 10:2, 9–10). Certain Egyptian examples reached lengths of over 100 feet; Biblical scrolls, however, rarely exceeded 30 feet in length, as in the case of a book like Isaiah (see Lk 4:17). Reading the contents of a scroll involved the awkward procedure of unrolling it with one hand while rolling it up with the other (see Isa 34:4; Eze 2:10; Lk 4:17, 20; Rev 6:14). Shortly after the time of Christ the scroll gave way to the book form still used today. (CSB)

*memorial in a book.* Possibly the Book of the Wars of the Lord (Nu 21:14). Moses witnessed to the knowledge and practice of record keeping and sacred history. (TLSB)

*Joshua hears it* - Joshua may have acted as a scribe. These events anticipated Joshua’s future leadership of Israel as well as additional battles with Amalek. (TLSB)

*blot out the memory* - War of annihilation against Amalek. (TLSB)

Moses later on describes the cowardly nature of the Amalek attack. When the Israelites “were weary and worn out,” they “cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God” (Deut. 25:18). For this reason the Lord directed Moses to record this incident on a scroll, to make sure that someday the people of God would “completely erase the memory of the Amalekites from under heaven.” (PBC)

**17:15** *my Banner.* Recalling Moses’ petition with upraised hands (see vv. 11–12, 16) and testifying to the power of God displayed in defense of his people. (CSB)

Hebrew for “banner” is related to “staff,” linking the altar to the place where Moses prayed over the battle against Amalek. (TLSB)

**17:16** Amalek tried to lay a hand upon the Lord’s property, a serious offense. (TLSB)

**17:8–16** Israel learns firsthand as they fight enemies such as Amalek that success depends on the Lord. Without the Lord’s direction and strength, they will lose. Victory comes by God’s intervention. • Heavenly Father, fight for us as we look to You in times of difficulty. Strengthen and protect us as we face challenges and enemies. Amen. (TLSB)