

Exodus Chapter 17

Verses 1-8: The people complained again, forgetting that if God could part the Red Sea, He could provide “water ... to drink”. The Lord’s assurance of His presence with Moses, “I will stand before thee”, recalls the first time Moses heard these words, at the burning bush (3:12).

Exodus 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."

“Rephidim”: To be identified as modern day Wadi Refayid.

Here we see again, a trial for these children of Israel. Rephidim was a place in the desert. We will see if they learned anything from the last trial.

Exodus 17:2 "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?"

“The people did chide”: This time the people, reacting to Moses’ leading them to a waterless site, quarreled with him or laid a charge against him. So intense was their reaction that Moses thought he was about to be stoned (verse 4). Significantly, the nation had not come to Rephidim without divine guidance (verse 1), in the midst of their emotional response, simply could not see that right before their eyes was the evidence of God’s leading.

"Chide" means to wrangle or to have a controversy. In other words, they were complaining again. Moses warned them that they were angering God with all of their complaining. This was a silly thing to ask Moses. Moses cannot manufacture water. They should pray and ask God for water.

Exodus 17:3 "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?"

They saw there was no water when they first came thither, and therefore chide Moses for bringing them to such a place, where they could not subsist; and having stayed some little time here, and all the water they brought with them from Alush being spent, and having none to drink, began to be very thirsty.

"And the people murmured against Moses": Became more impatient and enraged, and threw out their invectives against him with much malice and bitterness.

"Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt?" As it would have been much better for them to have stayed there, they thought.

"To kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst": Which is intolerable to any, and especially to children and cattle, which require frequent drinking. They could not suppose that Moses had such a murderous view in bringing them out of Egypt, or that this was his intention in it, but that this would be the issue and event of it.

This complaining was getting terrible and the people blamed Moses, because they did not have water. Not once did they realize that they were being tested.

Exodus 17:4 "And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me."

"Moses cried unto the Lord": The leader turned to God in prayer, whereas the people, instead of following his example, turned on their leader. Moses' petition was to an isolated incident. His life was characterized by prayer (15:25; 32:30-32; Num. 11:2, 11; 12:13; 14:13, 19), and by turning to God for solutions to problems and crises.

Moses did what the children of Israel should have done. He cried to God for help. It was to the point that he feared for his life.

Verses 5-6: Paul writes about this event: "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). The smitten stone of this chapter pictures Christ who, when He was smitten upon the cross, became the fountainhead of blessing, the Redeemer of the world.

"Go on before the people ... I will stand before thee": By these words in His instruction to Moses, the Lord reinforced both the position of Moses as leader and Himself as present to act. He answered the people's charge against Moses and their underlying challenge of His presence (verse 7). In fact, He intervened miraculously!

Exodus 17:5 "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."

The people were probably in no condition to move. They were exhausted. With a long day's march, they were weary, faint, nerveless. Moses and the elders, who probably journeyed on asses, would have more strength.

"Take with thee of the elders": As witnesses. Each miracle had an educational value, and was designed to call forth, exercise, and so strengthen the faith of the people.

The rock in Horeb must necessarily designate some particular rock of the Horeb region already known to Moses during his previous stay in these parts. It cannot possibly, however, have been the traditional "rock of Moses" in the Seil Leja, under Ras Sufsafeh, since that rock is a long day's journey from the site of Rephidim, near which the miracle must have been performed.

God wanted the people to know that the water He provided was a miracle from Him. God gave Moses this rod from the beginning to do miracles with. God was saying to Moses, you have it within your hand to remedy this situation.

Exodus 17:6 "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."

In my cloudy pillar, which shall stand over that place.

"Horeb and Sinai are sometimes spoken of as the same place, and sometimes as two differing places, as here, compared with (Exodus 19:2). The learned write, that this was one long mountain, whereof there were two eminent parts or tops, the one at a considerable distance from the other, and Horeb was the first part of it, and near Rephidim; and Sinai the more remote, to which they came afterwards.

"Moses did so": I.e. smote the rock and the waters flowed out plentifully and continually, making a river, which God caused to follow them to their several stations (see 1 Cor. 10:4).

This was the Lord speaking to Moses. The "Rock" that was struck was the Lord.

1 Corinthians chapter 10:4 "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

Jesus is the living water. Jesus told the woman at the well, that if she would drink of the water He gave her, she would never thirst again. This is that Water of Life.

I sing a song called "THERE IS A RIVER". It speaks of this river flowing from deep within. This spiritual river of water never ends, if you are a believer in Christ. Jesus is the Water of Life. Look, one more time at verse 6. The Lord said He would stand before Moses on the rock. When Moses strikes this rock, it is symbolic of the crucifixion of Jesus, who was struck for us all. This was done in front of the elders so that they could relate the miracle to their people.

Exodus 17:7 "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?"

"Massah, and Meribah": Appropriate names, "Testing" and "Contending," were assigned to this place; a disappointing culmination to all they had experienced of God's miraculous care and guidance (Psalm 95:7-8; Heb. 3:7-8).

Massah" was a place in the desert. "Meribah" was the name of two places in the desert. This was a very bad remark they had made "Is the Lord among us, or not?" It was almost as if they had given the Lord an ultimatum. We should never tempt the Lord. It is a very dangerous thing to challenge the Lord. These Israelites were on dangerous ground. They should be thanking Him for

all the past miracles and praying for His help. Instead they were even questioning whether He was with them or not. They failed this test, too.

Exodus 17:8 "Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim."

The Hebrew people had not been trained for war in their years of servitude in Egypt, but Moses had been given a royal course in leadership and warfare during his "palace years." This was an unprovoked attack from a brother nation; the Amalekites were descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob (Gen. 36:12, 16).

"Came Amalek, and fought": The Amalekites took their name from Amalek, the grandson of Esau, and dwelt as a nomadic people in the Negev. Israel first encountered their military at Rephidim in the wilderness (Exodus 17:8-13; Deut. 25:17-18). As a result, the Amalekites were doomed to annihilation by God (17:14; Num. 24:20; Deut. 25:19), but it would not be immediate (17:16). The Amalekites defeated disobedient Israel at Hormah (Num. 14:43-45).

Saul failed to destroy them as God ordered (1 Sam. 15:2-3, 9). David later fought and defeated the Amalekites (1 Sam. 30:1-20). In Hezekiah's day, the Amalekite remnant in the land was finally destroyed by Hezekiah (716-687 B.C.). The final descendants of Agag (Ester 3:1), the Amalekite king in Saul's day, were destroyed in Persia at the time of Esther and Mordecai (473 B.C.; Ester 2:5, 8-10).

Verses 9-13: Through the circumstances they experienced, Israel had learned how God provided food and water. They had to learn through warfare that God would also bring about defeat of hostile neighbors.

"Joshua" would be Moses' personal minister for the next 40 years. He was also put in charge of the military, beginning with the conflict with "Amalek". By holding the "rod of God", Moses physically demonstrated total dependence on God's authority and power.

Exodus 17:9 "And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand."

"Joshua": The name of Moses' aide-de-camp or personal minister (24:13; 33:11; Josh. 1:1), appears here for the first time in Exodus. His assignment to muster a task force was part of his being groomed for military leadership in Israel. Actually, at this stage his name was still Hoshea, which later changed to Joshua at Kadesh just before the reconnaissance mission in Canaan (Num. 13:16). At this stage, Israel could not be described as a seasoned army and was not even militarily well prepared and trained.

"The rod of God": The staff which Moses held up in his hands was no magic wand. Rather it had been previously used to initiate, via His chosen leader, the miracles which God did and about which He had informed Moses in advance. It became, therefore, the symbol of God's personal and powerful involvement, with Moses' outstretched arms perhaps signifying an appeal to God.

The ebb and flow of battle in correlation with Moses' uplifted or drooping arms imparted more than psychological encouragement as the soldiers looked up to their leader on the hilltop, and more than Moses' interceding for them. It demonstrated and acknowledged their having to depend upon God for victory in battle and not upon their own strength and zeal. It also confirmed the position of Moses both in relation to God and the nation's well-being and safety. They had angrily chided him for their problems, but God confirmed his appointment as leader.

Moses had confidence in God. Joshua was a strong young man who loved God. He would be the likely one for Moses to get to lead the army. Moses and Joshua knew, with God on their side, there was no chance of defeat. Moses on the hill, would be praising God for their victory. This was the same rod God had given Moses to do miracles with.

Verses 10-16: As long as Moses "held up his hand" in a gesture of dependence on Yahweh, the battle went Israel's way. When he wearied and lowered his hand, the battle went Amalek's way. Neither Moses nor the rod was empowering Joshua and his army; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was ensuring the victory. After the battle, Moses "built an altar" and named it as a "memorial" to the Lord in the manner of the patriarchs (e.g., Gen. 12:7-9).

Exodus 17:10 "So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill."

"Hur": Caleb's son and the grandfather of Bezalel, the artisan (31:2-11; 1 Chron. 2:19-20).

This was Joshua, the stone cutter, who would take over at Moses' death and continue the trip into the Holy land. This Amalek was probably, the father of the Amalekites. They lived and reigned in this desert area. We will find the reason for these two men God sent with Moses in the next few verses.

Exodus 17:11 "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed."

The hand that held the rod of God in it. This gesture, though fervent prayer was doubtless joined with it, seems not to have been the gesture of praying, which is the lifting up of both hands, but of an ensign-bearer, or of one ready to smite his enemies. Howsoever this was only a sign whereby Moses strengthened his faith, and quickened his prayers, and heightened the courage of the soldiers below. And that he expected victory not from the skill and prowess of his army, but from the assistance of God.

"When he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed": God so dispensing his favor, that the honor of the day and victory might be wholly ascribed to the rod and power of God, not to Israel.

There is victory in praise. Moses, in lifting his hand, evokes God's help. When his hand fell down, God was not helping. This was a lesson not only to Moses, but to all of these people that God's help was necessary to be victorious. As long as Moses' hands were lifted to heaven, God

was pouring down His Spirit. When Moses' hands dropped to his side, Moses could not receive anything from God. The only problem is that a man or woman cannot hold their hands straight up in the air for hours.

We read in Psalms 22:3 "But thou [art] holy, [O thou] that inhabitest the praises of Israel."

The problem was how to keep Moses' hands elevated to receive these blessings from God.

Exodus 17:12 "But Moses' hands [were] heavy; and they took a stone, and put [it] under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun."

Moses writes with a clear remembrance of his feelings at the time. His hands, long stretched to heaven, grew weary, "heavy," feeble. He could no longer raise them up, much less stretch them out, by his own muscular energy. They sank down, and dropped by his sides. If the battle was not to be lost, it was necessary to find some remedy. Apparently, Aaron and Hur thought themselves to be an effective remedy, none being suggested by Moses.

"They took a stone": Partly to give him a certain amount of rest, but perhaps, mainly to enable them the better to sustain his hands. The fact is one of those "little" ones, which none but one engaged in the transactions would have been likely to have been acquainted with.

"Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands": Left to himself, Moses had become exhausted both mentally and bodily, and when his hands dropped, had ceased to pray. Sustained physically by his two companions, his mind recovered itself, and was able to renew its supplications and continue them. The result was the victory.

Exodus 17:13 "And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."

Amalek being distinguished from "his people", has led some to think that Amalek was the name of the king, or general of the army, and that it was a common name to the kings of that nation, as Pharaoh was to the kings of Egypt. But for this there is no foundation in the Scriptures. As Amalek signifies the Amalekites, his people may design the confederates and auxiliaries, the other people, as Ben Gersom expresses it, they brought with them to fight against Israel.

And so Jerom says, by him another Canaanite dwelt, who also fought against Israel in the wilderness, of whom it is so written, and Amalek and the Canaanite dwelt in the valley (Num. 14:25). And who were all, the one as the other, at least the greatest part of them, cut to pieces by the edge of the sword of Joshua and the Israelites. Who obtained a complete victory over them; as the spiritual Israel of God will at last over all their spiritual enemies, sin, Satan, the world, and death.

If there ever was a Scripture that teaches the importance of praise, this is it. God dwells in (inhabits), the praises of His people. Some of the problems with churches today, is that we have

forgotten how to praise. If you have never felt the presence of God in your life, you should try it. It is wonderful. Just lift your hands up in the air, open your hands with your palms up, start telling God how much you love Him and He will make you aware of His presence. You will begin to tingle with His presence.

Solomon, standing before the Lord, prayed with both hands lifted high.

1 Kings 8:22-23 "And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven:" "And he said, LORD God of Israel, [there is] no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:"

This prayer goes on and you can read it (in 1 Kings 8:22-53). This is a beautiful prayer that we should take heed to. Be sure to read it all.

Exodus 17:14 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this [for] a memorial in a book, and rehearse [it] in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."

The reference to "Write ... in a book" is the first mention of writing as related to Scripture and official Hebrew records. It probably was done on papyrus, the most common Egyptian writing material. Moses evidently kept a diary of Israel's journey through the wilderness as implied (in Numbers 33:2). Certainly this is contrary to the earlier liberal view that Moses could not have written and did not. The curse in this verse upon "Amalek" was due to several factors. First, recall that they were related to the Israelites through Esau (Gen. 36:12). Second, we are told in (Deut. 25:17-19), that they took cruel advantage of those who were weak and faint and weary among the Israelite stragglers, and they "feared not God."

"Write this ... a memorial in a book, and rehearse it": Moses would have learned writing and record-keeping in Pharaoh's school of government. Official Hebrew records other than Scripture were also to be kept, and in this case especially for the purpose of remembering the victory in the very first battle in which they nationally engaged. God referred to "a book," so Moses had evidently already begun it. This was not, then, the initial entry into what perhaps became known as the 'Book of the Wars of the Lord' (Num. 21:14). Writing it was essential, so the facts could be verified and needed not to depend upon human memory or solely oral tradition.

"Put out the remembrance" The sentence of national extinction which the Amalekites proclaimed for Israel (Psalm 83:4-7), passed by divine decree upon the Amalekites. The sentence was partially realized in Saul's and David's day (1 Sam. 15:1-9 and 2 Sam. 1:1; 8:11-12), after which it is scarcely mentioned again. However, due to Saul's disobedience in sparing Agag, the Amalekite king and some of his people (1 Sam. 15:7-90), he lost his throne (verse 23). Samuel killed Agag (verse 33), but some Amalekites remained to return a few years later to raid Israel's southern territory, even capturing David's family (1 Sam. 30:1-5).

David killed all but 400 (1 Sam. 30:16-17), who escaped. It was a descendant of Agag named Haman, who tried to exterminate the Jews later in Esther's day (Est. 3:1, 6).

Finally, we learn from (Num. 24:20), that “Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.” As the first nation to attack the newly redeemed and separated Israel (and thus typical of all who later hated God’s people), the Amalekites received the full impact of God’s curse upon “him that curseth thee” (Gen. 12:3). Thus, in later history, the Amalekites who escaped from Saul (1 Sam. 15:7), were smitten by David (1 Sam. 30:17); and the ones who escaped from David were destroyed by the descendants of Simeon in the days of King Hezekiah (1 Chron. 4:43).

We see that God wanted Moses to be sure to tell Joshua why the battle was won. Here we see that God (not Joshua), puts the memory of Amalek out as far as heaven was concerned.

Exodus 17:15 "And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi:"

“Jehovah-nissi” (the Lord is my banner). By titling the altar with this designation for the Lord, Yahweh-Nissi, Moses declared the Lord Himself to be the standard (banner), of His people.

"Johovah-nissi" means Jehovah is my banner. His banner over me is love. This is true for all of His children.

Exodus 17:16 "For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn [that] the LORD [will have] war with Amalek from generation to generation."

“The Lord hath sworn”: The difficulty of the Hebrew text permits an alternative translation. “A hand is upon/toward/against the throne/banner of Yahweh,” with the sense of supplication, or of taking an oath. Contextually, the significance is clear, whatever the translation adopted. The ongoing problem with Amalek was not merely one nation hostile toward another; it was a war between God and Amalek.

Because the Amalekites attacked the Hebrew people as they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land, Yahweh announced through Moses a most solemn oath: “the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

This was saying to Moses, Joshua, the children of Israel, and the Christians of our day, that God will fight our enemies for us. "Amalek" symbolizes those that come against God's people. Our enemies are God's enemies. We needn't bother to fight these battles. God will take care of it for us.

Exodus Chapter 17 Questions

1. When the children of Israel left the wilderness of Sin, where did they stop next?
2. Where is Rephidim located?
3. What did they complain to Moses about this time?

4. What did Moses say this complaining was doing to God?
5. What does "chide" mean?
6. What did the people accuse Moses of, when they were out of water?
7. What did Moses tell God these people were about to do to him?
8. Where did Moses go for help?
9. What was Moses to take with him, when he went before the people?
10. Why was Moses to take the elders with him?
11. What was special about this Rock at Horeb?
12. What did God tell Moses to do to the Rock?
13. When Moses hit the Rock, what happened?
14. What did First Corinthians 10:4, tell us about this Rock?
15. What did Jesus tell the woman at the well?
16. What did the striking of this Rock symbolize?
17. What remark did the children of Israel make that seemed to be an ultimatum?
18. Who attacked the children of Israel?
19. Who led Israel's army?
20. What did Moses do during the battle?
21. What two men went with Moses?
22. Why was it so important for Moses to hold both hands in the air during the battle?
23. Amalek was the grandson of whom?
24. Who do some people believe Hur was?
25. There is victory in _____.
26. What did Aaron and Hur do to help?
27. What happened to Amalek?
28. God _____ the praises of His people.

29. How did Solomon pray to God in the temple?
30. What did God tell Moses to do for a memorial of this?
31. "Johovah-nissi" means what?
32. What does God say to the Christians in all of this?