

Christ the Rock

Exodus 17:1-7

Israel complained first about water, then about food, and now finishes the triad complaining about water again. Throughout Exodus Moses has been telling the story of God's nation and individuals within in who all pre-figured the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the greater Moses, born to a persecuted woman and set in a lowly basket. He is the Passover lamb whose blood was shed to spare His people from death. And He is the rock that was struck to provide water: "that rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4).

NOTES:

The Test

The Israelites camped at Marah, Elim, and now Rephidim, their last stop before Sinai (15:23, 27; 17:1). The Wilderness of *Sin* doesn't refer to transgression, though it's a helpful way to remember it. This complaint sounds similar to the others, making the point that habitual sin is obvious—they should know better. Despite their bitterness, God made the water of Marah sweet; Israel should have anticipated the Lord testing them again. Whereas previously the people complained (*lun*), now they contend or strive (*riv*) against Moses, a serious confrontation (cf. Gen. 13:7; Ps. 35:1). Again they accuse him of bringing them out of Egypt to kill them, their children, and their livestock with thirst (v3). Moses is not overreacting when he says they're almost ready to stone him (v5). "Give us water, that we may drink" is an ultimatum (v2). If they don't get what they're owed from Moses, he's going to pay. They demand God's provision (v2), disbelieve His protection (v3), and doubt His presence (v7). As with the manna, this is test to see if they will walk in His law (16:4). "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin" (Ex. 20:20). Testing keeps us from sin, causes us to fear the Lord, which then prevents us from sin. We no longer forget God or despair in the face of trials: "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives'" (Heb. 12:5-6). When we forget the goodness and sovereignty of God in and over what we are facing, we begin to test Him. Every time our devotion depends on circumstances, any time we would say, "I cannot serve a God like that", we are testing Him. He confronts us with Moses' question: "Why do you tempt the Lord?" When the devil tells Jesus to throw himself down and prove His divinity, He quotes Deuteronomy 6:6: "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Matt. 4:7).

The Trial

Moses goes directly to God to figure out what to do (v4). Israel tests the Lord, and He responds by calling for a trial, a ruling on what has just happened. He commands Moses to take some elders-judges to witness the verdict, and his staff of judgment that struck the river, turning it to blood and making the fish die and stink (v5). God will stand before him on the rock in Horeb, and when Moses strikes it, water will come out so the people can drink (v6). Israel has failed the test by quarrelling and accusing God, even being willing to murder Moses by stoning. And worse, they don't even

Christ the Rock

Exodus 17:1-7

know it. Instead of bringing just judgment, God brings the rod of judgment on Himself, and out flows life-giving water. At the exodus, God saved Israel apart from anything they did. He does the same thing again as they fail to follow Him. We are not saved by God and left alone to be faithful to Him. We don't get in by grace and then stay in by works. The gospel is for Christians too. Christ "became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, 'he who glories, let him glory in the Lord'" (1 Cor. 1:30). He alone provides for our sanctification.

The Rock

The trial ends when they drink from the rock, and Paul says the rock that followed them was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). Some speculate that the rock started to roll, miraculously following the Jews through the wilderness, but we can be sure Moses would have mentioned it. Paul's point is that God didn't just show up once but was constantly with them in the wilderness. His warning to the Corinthians is really sobering: "But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted" (10:5-6). They were baptized in the cloud and sea, ate manna, and drank from the rock just like you do, and still they didn't make it to the Promised Land. Moralistic preaching ignores the gospel and simply tells people what to do. But preaching that leaves out what it means to believe the gospel doesn't really understand it. Here it's God and the rock, the Father and the Son, the Father striking the Son so that grace, all bestowed by Spirit, flows out to His people. Everyone drinks and is quenched. And everyone is warned. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved, and live a life of repentance, refusing to be dominated by complaints and bitterness. God gives you all you need to be assured, and it's the kind of assurance that hates presumption. Rephidim is renamed Massah ("Testing-town") and Meribah ("Contention-ville") to help us not forget it. We've been there and should not go back. We should see Christ struck with the justice of God on the cross, the penalty of death for our sins, and there from side flowed blood and water (Jn. 19:34). We should drink from Christ and not go thirsty.