

November 19th, 2023

And the Rock Was Christ

Exodus 17:1-7

Wash, rinse, repeat

One of the things my boys like doing is to hit the rewind button over and over again when a funny scene comes on a movie. Monica and I at some point will say “ok, enough, no more rewinding, just play the movie.” That’s what this bit in Exodus feels like. Ever since Israel left Egypt, it’s like we are watching the same clip over and over again. They were trapped at the Red Sea—so they accuse God of bringing them into the wilderness to die (14:11). Then God saved them. They arrived at the bitter waters of Marah, they bitterly grumble (15:24). Then God healed the water. They come to the wilderness of Sin and said it would have been better to die in Egypt because at least there they could eat well (16:3). So God rained bread from Heaven. Now Israel is at Rephidim, and it’s just a replay of the same clip. Why all the repetition? Because this is the Christian life. How many times have you and I felt trapped beyond all hope? How many times have we seen our resources fail? How many times has unbelief taken over? How many times have we grumbled in our circumstances—the very circumstances God ordained? How many times have we failed the test? And how many times has God delivered? Dear congregation, Israel in the wilderness *is us*. God is holding the rewind button down, so will we begin to see that this is *our problem*. God wants us us to trust Him. Our trials our tests exist to see if we will walk in God’s law or not. Let’s see how Israel does on this test.

I. Our Doctrine

He establishes all our steps

Please look with me at v.1 “All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, *according to the commandment of the LORD.*” Yahweh led them there by the fire cloud. Exodus 40:36 “Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up...the people of Israel would set out.” Their journey was Divinely determined. Dear congregation, you already know this. But God is hitting rewind. The circumstances in your life right now are not accidents—they were predestined. That’s the first thing we forget isn’t it? Israel had a reminder that God led them there because the fire cloud was right in there midst. We have the Word, we have all of the fulfilled prophecies, we have the cross. We have so much more to remind us—that whenever we find ourselves in a trial—God is the one who brought us to this place.¹

The resting place

Continuing on, we read they “...camped at Rephidim.” Rephidim means “resting place” or “place of rest.”² Perhaps paradoxically, Israel’s trial was *aimed* at producing not distress, but *rest*. Trials are given to God’s people that we might

¹ “The path of faith,” as A.W. Pink said, “is a path of trial. Those who are led by [the Spirit of] God must expect to encounter that which is displeasing to the flesh, and also a constant and real testing of faith itself. God’s design is to wean us from everything down here, to bring us to the place where we have no reliance upon material and human resources, to cast us completely upon Himself. O how slow, how painfully slow we are to learn this lesson! How miserably and how repeatedly we fail!” Source: <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/pink/Gleanings%20In%20Exodus%20-%20Arthur%20W.%20Pink.pdf> pg. 256-257, Accessed November 17, 2023.

² Joseph Parker insightfully says here “Geographers say they cannot find out the exact [location or Rephidim]. Verily, there need be no difficulty about the exact locality—it is just where we are. We carry the locality with us.” Quoted in Rousas John Rushdoony, *Commentaries on the Pentateuch: Exodus*, (Vallecito, CA.: Ross House Books, 2004), pg. 219

learn to rest in Him. Our circumstances can never bring us rest, but only God alone.

No water

What were these new circumstances? End of v.1 “...but there was no water for the people to drink.” Here’s the test. And its a far more frightful test than previously. John Currid explains “At Marah there was [bitter] water, and God made it sweet. At Rephidim water must appear, apparently, *ex nihilo* [out of nothing].”³ If they came to bitter water again, they could have ‘believed’ God. But certainly this is different right? *‘These circumstances are beyond the power of God.’* How many times do we rationalize the same way? ‘God delivered back there, but this is different?’ So what does Israel do? They put God on trial.

Suing God

Look at v.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?”” Fascinating here that the Hebrew word for *test* “is the term for a covenant lawsuit.”⁴ Phil Ryken says here that “Israel was bringing God to trial.”⁵ They were putting God in the dock. They were suing Him. They were acting as if God was a criminal and they were the prosecuting attorney. And there are three charges they bring against God.

³ John D. Currid, *Exodus Vol. 1: Chapters 1-18*, (Auburn, MA.,: Evangelical Press, 2000), pg. 359

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Preaching the Word: Exodus, Saved for God’s Glory*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2015), pg. 414

⁵ *Ibid*

Charge #1: They charge God with not providing for them

In v.2 they demand “*Give* us water to drink.” The verb is in the imperative mood. They are demanding that God act now. He has failed to provide for them, and now they are suing Him for damages.

Charge #2: They charge God with not protecting them

Look at v.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?*” This illustrates the stupidity and wickedness of sin. Though Israel had experienced mercy after tender mercy from Jehovah, they had hardened their hearts⁶ and now accused him of trying to kill them. They blame Moses on the surface, but it wasn’t Moses who brought them out of Egypt it was the LORD. It reminds me of the story that came out last week when women’s soccer star Megan Rapinoe injured her achilles and had to leave the game—probably the last game of her career—and she responded to her injury by saying “If there was a God, this is proof there isn’t”⁷ Here Rapinoe has a immortal soul and is one of the most famous athletes in the world, but one thing goes wrong and she accuses God. Here Israel was redeemed from two centuries of slavery, and now they charge God of not protecting them.

Charge #3: They charge God with not being present with them

Look at the end of v.7 “...they *tested* [same Hebrew word for covenant lawsuit] the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” Apparently Israel assumed that life should be perfectly easy after they left Egypt. And if they

⁶ Psalm 95:8 “...do not harden your hearts, as at *Meribah*, as on the day at *Massah* in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.”

⁷ <https://notthebee.com/article/megan-rapinoe-says-she-has-proof-that-theres-no-god-because-she-was-injured-in-her-final-soccer-game> Accessed November 26, 2023

experienced any upsetting circumstance, then it was evidence that God had abandoned them, that God had forsook them.

Those were the three charges, they charged God with **1)** not providing; **2)** not protecting and **3)** not being present with them.

Mad as hell

Now how angry was God at this? The text doesn't tell us, but all the rest of Scripture: Moses⁸, the Psalmist⁹, Jesus¹⁰ and the Apostles¹¹ all look back on with condemnation.

- Psalm 95:8-9 “...do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, 9 when your fathers put me to the test...”
- Deuteronomy 9:22 “...at Massah...you provoked the LORD to wrath.”

Murder in their hearts

Israel was so wicked at this point that Moses was afraid for his life. Look at v.4 “So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

God put Himself in the dock

Look at what He says in v.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

⁸ Deuteronomy 6:16; 9:22; 33:8

⁹ Psalm 95:8-11

¹⁰ Matthew 4:7—Jesus is citing Deuteronomy 6:16

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Hebrews 3:7-4:6; Jude 5

the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶Behold, 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.” Notice three things here **1)** In v.5 Moses was to take the staff of judgment with him—this was the staff that God judged Egypt with. **2)** In v.6, the LORD Himself was going to take His stand on *the rock* at Horeb. Yahweh had appeared in the burning bush and in the fire cloud, and now He is going to mystically appear on this Rock at Horeb.¹² Horeb was another name for Sinai.¹³ It is the place where the law was going to be given. So take it in. Yahweh is going to stand on the Rock where the God’s law is going to be delivered. In other words, God is accepting this covenant lawsuit. He’s putting Himself in the dock. **3)** In v.6, He tells Moses to strike the Rock. Just as Moses had used the rod to judge Egypt—now the Rock where the LORD is standing will be judged. He will be struck. As a result, water would come out, and Israel would be saved.¹⁴

The LORD answered all three charges.

- He *provided* for them. He gave them water (charge #1).
- He *protected* them. He endured the rod of judgment so that they were spared (charge #2).
- He was *present* with them. He once again appear in their midst on the Rock (charge #3).

¹² Though we are not told the particular form He will take or if He will take a form at all.

¹³ This was some distance from Rephidim. Probably why it was the elders only who accompanied Moses so they could be witnesses.

¹⁴ This water would be their supply for the rest of the book of Exodus, since they remained at Mt. Sinai for some time in order to receive the 10 commandments and build the tabernacle. Look at this source: <https://www.bible.ca/archeology/bible-archeology-exodus-route-rephidim-meribah.htm>

Our doctrine: Christ the Rock; Spirit the Water

That brings us to **our doctrine**: *God struck Christ for our sin and supplied the Spirit for our sanctification...* Dear congregation if there was ever a passage the demonstrates that God teaches us through types it is this passage. Consider the two types on display.

Type #1: The Rock was Christ

Please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. As Paul is dealing with the Corinthians and their own proclivity to test the Lord, and sin like Israel sinned, he points to these events:

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and *the Rock was Christ.*”

The Rock was itself an appearing of Christ to Israel. Oh dear congregation do you see the gospel narrative in Exodus? In Exodus 16, God sent down the bread from Heaven—this was the Incarnation—God the Son coming down to earth. Now in Exodus 17 we have the crucifixion of the Son—Jesus bore the judgment of God—by being struck down in the place of sinners.

Type #2: The Water was the Spirit

Please turn with me to John 7:37-39. Here Jesus is at the Feast of Booths—the yearly feast the Jews celebrated to commemorate their time in the

wilderness. It was at this feast they would have celebrated the Water from the Rock. And Jesus said:

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”
³⁹ *Now this he said about the Spirit*, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

The Spirit was the water that Jesus the Rock gives us to drink. Dear congregation, behold the magnificent truth here! When Jesus was *glorified*—when He was struck down for our sins—then the Holy Spirit, the Living Water, was supplied. Consider, what was the first thing that happened in the book of Acts after Jesus’ resurrection? What was Pentecost? It was a pouring out of the Spirit on God’s people. Acts 2:18 “...in those days *I will pour out my Spirit.*” Acts 2:33 “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father *the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [Christ] has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*”¹⁵

¹⁵ “Out from the smitten rock flowed the water. Beautiful type was this of the Holy Spirit—gift of the crucified, now glorified, Savior. May not this be one reason why the Holy Spirit is said to be “poured out” (Acts 2:18)?—speaking in the language of this very type. The gift of the Holy Spirit was consequent upon the crucifixion and exaltation of the Lord Jesus. This is clear from His own words from John 7:37, 38: “Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” Now mark the interpretation which is given us in the very next verse: “But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” The Holy Spirit has given us a supplementary word through the Psalmist which enhances the beauty of the picture found in Exodus 17. There we are told, “He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river. For He remembered His holy promise (to) Abraham His servant” (105:41,42). It was because of His covenant to Abraham that God gave the water to Israel [cf. the same order in Galatians 3:13-14—Jesus was struck down so the promise of the Spirit would be given]. Pink, pg. 256-257

Summa Theologica

That's **our doctrine**: Just as God struck the Rock at Horeb sparing Israel from judgment so God struck Christ for all our sin. Just as that Rock supplied all the water Israel would need, so Christ has supplied us with His Spirit for our sanctification.

II. Our Duty

Experimental Use

We need to return to the idea of Israel being tested. Since they left Egypt, we've seen 4 tests. They were tested at the Red Sea, at the waters of Marah, in the wilderness of Sin, and here at Rephidim. At each test they failed, but here at Rephidim they miserably failed. And Moses brings special attention to it by asking "Why do you test the LORD?" (v.2) So we must *examine* ourselves. How do we respond when we are in Rephidim? Ask yourself, when God is testing you, do you turn the tables on Him? Do you put God in the dock when things aren't going as you think you ought? Maybe you're unsure. Is there a way to know if we are testing the LORD? Yes. There are three warning signs in our passage.

Warning sign #1: We are testing the LORD if we grumble in our circumstances

v.3 says "But the people thirsted for water (their circumstance), and the people *grumbled*." Certainly God welcomes prayers when we are in need—in fact that is what He is aiming at. But the people didn't pray. They grumbled, they murmured, they sighed, they despaired. That is testing the LORD. Oh how guilty we are of this. How often our first response to unwanted circumstances is to

complain whether out loud or in our heart! How should we respond? Philippians 4:6-7 “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” We often are robbed of peace because we grumble and don’t take it to the Lord in prayer. This is testing the LORD.

Warning sign #2: We are testing the LORD if we quarrel with His authorities

This is the part that is so easy to miss. v.2 “The people quarreled *with Moses...*” And Moses asks them “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?”¹⁶ A.W. Pink says here “Moses at once reminded the Israelites that in criticizing him they [tested] the LORD...Moses was their appointed leader, God’s representative to the people; and therefore to murmur against him was to murmur against the LORD Himself.”¹⁷ Children, boys and girls do you realize that if you murmur against your parents, you are testing the LORD? Wives do you realize if you murmur against your husband, you are testing the LORD? Dear congregation, do you realize if we murmur against your pastors, we are testing the LORD? Our leaders are not perfect. Children your parents are not perfect. Wives your husbands are not perfect. Dear congregation you pastors are not perfect. God knows that. But He has appointed them nonetheless. As the Heidelberg Catechism Q.104 says:

I am “...to honor, love, and be loyal to my mother and father *and all those in authority over me*; that I submit in proper obedience to all their good teaching

¹⁶ In fact they were so mad at Moses, they were ready to stone him (v.4).

¹⁷ Pink, pg. 253

and discipline and also that I be patient with their failings—*for through them God chooses to rule over us.*”

If we murmur against those in authority over us, we are testing the LORD.

Warning sign #3: We are testing the LORD if we believe lies

Israel believed two lies about God here. **1)** they believed He was trying to kill them (end of v.3) and **2)** they believed He had abandoned them (end of v.7). Israel’s essential problem was they believed lies, specifically, about how their wilderness experience should go. They began to believe that life was all about them—their own comfort, their personal peace. As one author says here “Israel refused to understand why God, who had performed such great miracles in Egypt and after, was not now giving them an easy and cushioned life.”¹⁸ How many of us fall into this same trap? *‘God saved us and now it’s His job to keep us trouble free all the way to the Promised Land.’* Oh but dear congregation, that’s to believe lies. The Exodus is not about Israel. Human history is not about us. It’s about greatness of God. God has ordained all things that come to pass for His own glory as the catechism says.¹⁹ Exodus 9:16 “But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.” When we get that wrong, when we believe God is supposed to work all things for our comfort and not for His great glory, we are believing lies. And that is testing the LORD.

¹⁸ Rushdoony, pg. 217-218

¹⁹ Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.7

Admonitory Use

Be warned dear congregation, what Israel did here at Rephidim was because their hearts were hard. Psalm 95:7-8 says “Today, if you hear his voice, *do not harden your hearts*, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test...” If you find yourselves testing God, listen to His voice, repent and turn back to the LORD.

Summa Theologica

That’s **our duty**. We ought never to test the Lord. How do we know if we are testing Him? We test the LORD whenever we **1)** grumble at our circumstances; **2)** quarrel with His appointed authorities; **3)** believe the lie that this life is all about me.

III. Our Delight

Consolatory Use: Christ is our Rock

Our **first delight** is that Christ is our Rock. Dear congregation, why didn’t God annihilate Israel? Ever since Israel left Egypt, she has failed every test God has given her. And at Rephidim she gravely sinned. Why didn’t God annihilate her? Because Christ took His stand on the Rock and was judged in her place. Christ the Rock was struck with rod of punishment. Israel sinned but Christ suffered. And this Rock at Horeb is the origin of every other place in Scripture where God is called a rock.²⁰

²⁰ Someone might be able to argue that the origin of this “Rock Theology” started in Genesis 49:24 “the Stone of Israel.” No less than 33 times in the OT is God referred to as the Rock.

- The LORD is “*The Rock* that bore you.” (Deuteronomy 32:18)
- He is the incomparable rock “...there is no *rock* like our God.”²¹ (1 Samuel 2:2).
- He is “...*my rock* and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, *my rock*, in whom I take refuge,” (2 Samuel 22:22-23)
- “*The Rock of Israel*” (2 Samuel 23:3)
- “*My rock* and redeemer” (Psalm 19:14)
- “*My rock* and my salvation” (Psalm 62:2)
- “*My mighty rock*” (Psalm 62:7)
- “*The Rock of [my] refuge*” (Isaiah 17:10)

Dear congregation, why hasn't God annihilated us? How many times have we tested God? Where is our judgment? It fell on that Rock at Horeb. Jesus took His stand on that Rock and has never moved. Christ bore it all. Oh what a comfort! Jesus doesn't only pay for our Egyptian sins, He makes satisfaction for every sin all the way to the Promised Land. He is not a partial Redeemer. He's Christ the Solid Rock. *On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.* Children, boys and girls, **why is Jesus called the Solid Rock?** Why not a small pebble? Would that inspire faith when you find yourself failing again and again? Would a pebble god be able to hold you up? No He is called the Rock because He is the Almighty God.

Isaiah 9:6 “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, [the] *Mighty God*...”

²¹ Interesting where David hides himself in the wilderness cf. 1 Samuel 23:25, 28

Why is Christ called a Rock? Because though our loyalties fail and we are unfaithful, Jesus will never change Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” And He will be faithful all the way to the gates of hell. 2 Timothy 2:13 “...if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.”

Why is Christ called the Rock? Because all who build their life on Him—make Jesus the foundation of their existence will never perish. Jesus said that all who hear His words and believe them will be a house built on the Rock. And though the rain fall, the floods come, and the winds blow and beat on the house, it will not fall, because it is founded on the Rock (Matthew 7:24-25).

To the unbeliever

Perhaps you are here this morning and Jesus is not your Rock. He is not the foundation of your life. Oh dear friend, this Jesus says that your life is built on sand. When the rain falls, the floods come and the winds blow and beat against your house, and you will fall and great will be your fall. You cannot stand under the rod of judgment that you deserve for your sins. Repent quickly and cling to Christ the Rock and Redeemer of the world. Trust in Him by faith and all your sins will be forgiven.

Consolatory Use: The Holy Spirit is our Water

Our **second delight** is that the Holy Spirit is our Living Water. Why did Moses leave Rephidim and go to Horeb which is also Sinai? Well starting next chapter, Israel is going to be at Sinai for the rest of the Exodus. *Here's my speculation:* this Rock was going to provide water for the entire rest of the Exodus. It would give them water while Moses is receiving the 10

commandments, and while they are building the tabernacle. How does this help us? Because it teaches us that Jesus didn't just give us the Spirit as a one-off. The Holy Spirit of God is with us always until the end of the age.

- **What do we need in this wilderness journey?** We need to be sanctified. Without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). What does God do? He supplies us with the Spirit for our sanctification. 1 Corinthians 6:11 “But you were washed, you were sanctified...*by the Spirit of our God.*”²²
- **What do we need on this wilderness journey?** We need to be led by the Spirit for “if [we] live according to the flesh [we] will die” (Romans 8:13). What does God do for us? He supplies us with the Spirit who ever lives to lead us in the ways of God. Romans 8:14 “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”
- **What do we need on this wilderness journey?** We need to persevere to the end. Matthew 24:13 “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” What does God do for us? He supplies us with the Spirit of perseverance. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 “And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, ²²and who has also put his seal on us and *given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*”

God has supplied us with the Living Water for our entire journey home.

Hortatory Use

So then what do we do with this passage? What is our charge? Look at v.7 “And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the

²² What do we need on this wilderness journey? We need to love as true children of Christ. 1 John 3:14 “Whoever does not love abides in death.” What does God do for us? He supplies the Holy Spirit who bears these fruits in us. Galatians 5:22 “But *the fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, etc.”

quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” John Currid says here: “The purpose of naming the site in this way was so that the people of Israel should never forget how foolishly and shamefully they had acted here.”²³ Isn’t that interesting? That place was permanently named after their sin so they would not forget. That is our charge loved ones: *we must not forget*. It is vital to know that we are forgiven. The Son of God has set us free. But we must not forget what God has redeemed us from. God set up this memorial so that Israel wouldn’t continue to commit the same sins again. So loved ones *don’t forget*. Don’t forget what you have been redeemed from. Don’t forget what Christ had to be punished for. Visit those memorials in you heart, not to heap guilt on yourself, but to be admonished never to return to Massah and Meribah. Look on those memorials with gratefulness that Your Rock has Redeemed you, and be led by the Spirit of God.

²³ Currid, pg. 363-363