



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text
Exodus 17:1-7

Topic
God sends Moses to strike the rock with his rod
to provide water in the wilderness

Title
"The Emissary Strikes Rock"

This morning, come and listen to my story about a man named Jed. A poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed. And then one day he was shootin' at some food, and up through the ground come a bubblin' crude.

Oil that is, black gold, Texas tea.

I'm no oilman, but I'd guess that a round from an old muzzleloader inadvertently shot into the ground at an angle isn't going to produce a geyser of oil that will get you an address in Beverly Hills.

We're going to read about Moses striking a rock with his shepherd's rod. Water from the rock will gush to satisfy the needs of both the Israelites and their livestock.

Critics who deny any supernatural or miraculous explanation for this event want us to believe Moses struck a naturally occurring aquifer. They want us to believe that he was the Jed Clampett of the wilderness, and with a lucky strike found water for several million Israelites and their livestock.

Why is it so hard to believe God did, and does, miracles? G.K. Chesterton once said, "The whole order of things is as outrageous as any miracle which could presume to violate it."

We're going to take a look at this miracle strike. As we do, we'll additionally see some things about God's leading - both then and now.

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 God Will Lead You To Learn You, and #2 God Will Not Lead You To Leave You.

#1 God Will Lead You To Learn You (v1-3)

I know what you're thinking: Gene should have paid more attention to grammar in English classes. I sound like Huck Finn, who said of Miss Watson, "She tried to learn you manners."

Turns out (and I quote), "A sentence fragment that is often believed to be grammatically incorrect, is actually completely correct. The word 'learn' is actually rooted in an Old English verb meaning "to teach," and can be used transitively in this manner, e.g. "I'm going to learn you a lesson."

Let's see how God learns us in these verses.

Exo 17:1 Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped in Rephidim; but *there was no water for the people to drink.*

Put these two phrases together: "According to the commandment of the Lord... There was no water."

God specifically told Moses to lead the Israelites to a place where there would be no water. To a place of lack, where He would have to supply the need.

Look back on your walk with the Lord and you can see times where you lacked. There was no employment... No friends... No health. Those are times God wants to show Himself sufficient for your needs.

Have you encountered the term, Generation Snowflake? It was one of 2016's *Collins Dictionary* words of the year. It is an informal, and derogatory, way to describe the generation of people who became adults in the 2010s. They are viewed as being less resilient and more prone to taking offence than any previous generations.

The suggestion is that, like snowflakes, these people are delicate individuals and a slight increase in temperature will see them melt, often resulting in a high emotional response.

It's proven true by the observation that some of those supposedly in Generation Snowflake have suggested the label itself is causing them mental health issues.

Christians can be snowflakes. In the Book of Hebrews, suffering from persecution, believers were drawing back from walking with the Lord. Things were just too tough, they thought.

The writer to the Hebrew believers said, “You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (12:4). None of the Hebrews had experienced such intense exhaustion or persecution that it brought them to death or martyrdom. They were told to therefore quit being snowflakes.

One commentator said, “God loves us, but He is not an overprotective parent who has us tied to His apron strings. He will send us into the most excruciating situations [especially] to proclaim His Word. God will do what he did with the apostle Paul with you and me.”

Do you want to be a Snowflake Christian? Of course you don't. One of the first things to remember is that God will lead you to places of lack.

Exo 17:2 Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." So Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the LORD?"

Earlier on their journey they had found water that was too bitter to drink. God made that water drinkable, and sweet, by having a tree thrown into it.

We talked about how that tree prefigured the Cross upon which Jesus died.

You'd think that since God provided water before, they'd believe He would do it again. Except that the circumstances were much different:

- At Marah, there *was* water - even if at first it wasn't potable.
- At Rephidim, there was *no* water to be made potable.

The need was the same... God was the same... But the circumstances were more severe, and, so, their faith was being tested.

In my life, the needs are the same... And God is the same... But my trials get more (not less) severe as I walk with the Lord - testing my faith. Testing *your* faith.

Those of you who play video games: Do the levels get easier, or harder, as you progress? They get harder; you want them to get harder. You must defeat them in order to receive the hidden rewards.

Moses deferred to God, as well he should have. Sure, he was the point man; but it wasn't Moses leading Israel. It was God.

We'll see how it was that they "tempted the Lord" when we get to verse seven.

Exo 17:3 And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why *is* it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

Their thirst was real. Their need for water was, in fact, a matter of life and death.

Christians find themselves in real need, facing matters of life and death.

In the case of the Israelites and the exodus, God would provide the life-giving resource they needed. It seems none of them died from thirst.

In the case of Christians on our journey homeward, God will provide the eternal life-giving resources we need. But it doesn't mean we won't suffer; and it doesn't mean we won't die.

What was true physically for Israel in the wilderness is true for us spiritually in the world:

- They would receive all the water they needed.
- We can receive torrents of living water - every *spiritual* resource we need.

With those resources, we “quench the violence of fire, escape the edge of the sword, become valiant in battle, turn to flight the armies of the enemies. We receive the dead raised to life again. **AND** we are tortured, not accepting deliverance, that we might obtain a better resurrection. We have trials of mockings and scourgings, and of chains and imprisonment. We are stoned, we are sawn in two, we are tempted, we are slain with the sword. We wander about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented...”

That was a long paraphrase from the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, known to Christians as the Hall of Faith. It lists many heroes and heroines of the faith, along with their accomplishments.

Which half of that paraphrase are you in right now? Are you being abundantly blessed? Or terribly buffeted?

One of my favorite meditations (if that's the right term) is the story of James and Peter in the Book of Acts. King Herod put to death James, the brother of John. Seeing that it pleased the Jews, he seized the apostle Peter and locked him in the prison to await similar execution.

Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and there were guards before the door. Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off *his* hands.

Peter was able to walk right by (or maybe over!) the guards and escape into the night.

Why was James martyred, but Peter spared? Some have suggested that it was because fervent prayer was offered by the church for Peter, but not for James.

We do read about the church praying for Peter. But there are at least two problems with the fervent prayer argument:

1. First, we can't say that the church didn't pray for James. Just because it wasn't recorded, it doesn't mean it didn't happen. I'd say most likely they did pray for him.
2. Second, although their prayers for Peter may have been fervent, they prayed with some unbelief. When Peter showed up at the meeting after his angelic escape, they refused to believe it was really him knocking on the door - even as they were fervently praying for his release.

A better, more biblical, answer is that God had a different leading for James than He did for Peter. He called James home, while sending Peter on to evangelize.

God can use **your** circumstances to learn you. Mostly, to learn you that His grace is your sufficiency at all times, and in all circumstances.

#2 God Will Not Lead You To Leave You

(v4-7)

I interrupt our study to bring you this public service announcement: **Coffee is not a diuretic.**

It is commonly believed that you need to offset your morning coffee with a big glass of water to stay hydrated. British researchers published a study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* which compared several popular beverages to the hydrating effects of water. They found that you *can* hydrate with coffee.

So sip that morning brew with confidence - you're adding to your daily fluid intake, and that means you're hydrating.

If the exodus were happening today, there'd be a Starbucks every few miles along the route the Israelites were taking. There wasn't. And there wasn't any water, either.

Exo 17:4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!"

Emojis are a great way to communicate. For those of you from Riverdale, an emoji is a small digital image or icon used to express an idea, or an emotion, in electronic communication.

What I type can always be taken the wrong way. Add autocorrect to the mix and you've got a recipe for disaster.

That's where emojis are handy. That smiley face trumps any possible misinterpretation. In fact, I can say something awful, but if it's followed by a winking emoji, I'm safe.

You probably know that there are Bible emojis, but did you know that an "emoji translation" of the Bible is now available? Search for "Bible Emoji" on iTunes. It is described as "a great and fun way to share the Gospel."

What does any of this have to do with our study? I have not the slightest clue to what emoji Moses would have added when he said, "What shall I do with this people?" Was he angry? Perplexed? Sad?

I'm saying we need to be careful reading emotions in to the Bible things we can't possibly know.

I think we *can* assume that the people really did want to stone Moses.

Exo 17:5 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go.

In ancient societies, the elders were the adult men, usually older, who assumed some leadership in the tribe. We'll suggest why Moses was told to take them in a moment.

Exo 17:6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Let's talk about Horeb. The *Strong's Concordance* says that the word means *desolate*. You gotta love this. They were in the desert; there was no water; **so God's solution was to go to a place even worse off, called "desolate."**

Have you ever followed the Lord into Horeb? Things were already bad, but I guess not bad enough, because He took you further in.

Maybe you're there now and instead of Horeb you would call it *horrible*. I'd like to promise you that you are about to be delivered; but I don't know if you are on a James-track, or a Peter-track. I can only say that God's grace will prove sufficient.

Moses was instructed to "strike" a particular rock with his rod. I suggest that this was ridiculous, in this sense: The rod could never penetrate the rock. No matter the force of the blow, the rock would not yield.

Besides, how does water come from a rock? It doesn't - especially in a place so dry it's called "desolate."

In Psalm 78:15-16 we get a description of this rock:

Psa 78:15 He split the rocks in the wilderness, And gave *them* drink in abundance like the depths.

Psa 78:16 He also brought streams out of the rock, And caused waters to run down like rivers.

A couple of things to realize:

1. One thing is that this was no trickle of water. It wasn't like a well that you could get a pail full of water from. No, this ran like "rivers." Remember, there were several million Israelites, along with innumerable livestock.
2. Another thing to realize is that the Israelites would be in this general region for the next eleven months or so. This was a continual source of water for about a year.

The fact Moses did this "in the sight of the elders" might indicate that it wasn't something that all the Israelites witnessed. It would therefore be up to the elders to spread the word as to how God had provided this abundance of water.

Your testimony of how the Lord is working in your life, and in the lives of others, is important. Most people do not come to church or attend a Bible study. But they do see and hear you.

God went and "stood" by the rock at Horeb. Most likely it was the pillar of cloud who moved onto the rock. Then, according to God's command, Moses struck the rock with his staff and out came water.

So you might say that Moses struck the Lord in order to provide the life-giving water. More on that in a moment.

Exo 17:7 So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

The two words mean "testing" and "contending." It seems to be a compound name - like Dallas-Fort Worth, or Minneapolis-St. Paul.

It's a little sad that what was such a tremendous miracle would bear such a terrible name down through the centuries. I wonder if in Heaven, at the Reward Seat of Jesus, we will find out that our spiritual battles and lessons have been given names? Names that the Lord has given them in light of how we fared going through them.

They asked, "Is the Lord among us or not?" In asking that, they were tempting God.

It's a temptation because what they were saying was, "God, you must prove You are among us by giving us what we are asking for."

God had already proven He was among them - and that He was for them, not against them:

- Over 400 years earlier, God had promised Abraham He would be with his descendants in their captivity in Egypt.
- He raised-up for them the promised deliverer.
- God was definitely among them during the ten plagues.
- God manifested Himself to them as a pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night. He literally was among them!
- The cloud prohibited the advance of the Egyptian army as they came to destroy the Israelites.

- God parted the Red Sea so the Israelites could cross over on dry ground.
- God unparted the Red Sea, killing the Egyptians who pursued in their chariots.
- God provided sweet water from bitter at Marah.
- He sent quail for meat, and had been giving manna each morning.

It was incredible they should demand God prove Himself. It hinted a belief that God had left them to fend for themselves.

We are similar to them when we demand God change our situation:

- We seem to forget that He saved us from sin and Satan and the Second Death.
- We seem to disregard the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
- We willfully ignore anything marvelous God has done in our past.

God doesn't lead you to leave you. He is often more present in times that He seems absent.

I know that sounds contradictory, but it's true. Look at the Israelites. God seemed absent; but we know He was more present among them than ever.

There's more to this rock than meets the eye.

The apostle Paul wrote about the rock Moses struck. He says that 'they all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ' (First Corinthians 10:4).

In some sense, therefore, the striking of the rock at Rephidim, resulting in the provision of water, provides us with an analogy of the one who is our Rock, and Who gives us spiritual water to drink: Jesus Christ.

Jesus wasn't the rock - not literally. It's a type. He was *represented* by the rock.

We saw that the rock was struck while the pillar of cloud was there; that God was, in that sense, struck. The Israelites wouldn't have understood, but we know that Jesus - in order to save mankind - had to be struck. He had to be smitten, and to die, for the sins of the world.

According to James Jordan, "the glory-cloud stood before Moses and when Moses struck the rock, his rod passed through the cloud. The Lord thereby submitted to the rod of judgment, taking the punishment the people deserved for their insolence, and out of His vicarious suffering provided life-giving water. In short, when Moses struck the rock, he was also striking **the** Rock - and it was the latter that really provided water for the people."

The rock Moses struck did not literally "follow" them. It didn't roll after them. I think that would have been cool, but that's not what it is saying.

The word "them" is not in the original Greek text; the sentence says that they drank of the water from the rock, and that this event followed the giving of the manna.

One resource I consulted said the following:

There is no hint of movement of the rock in the Old Testament, but a legend developed on the basis of a Jewish interpretation of Numbers 21:17, which tells us that when Israel came to Beer, where Moses assembled the people to receive water, "Then Israel sang this song, "Spring up, O well! Sing to it!" Jewish tradition apparently said that the water on this occasion came from the same rock that Moses had struck in Exodus 17, and which thus had travelled with the people to this new location.

It didn't travel with them. I should mention that there is a second rock strike recorded in the Book of Numbers. It is a different one, on another occasion. The rock in Numbers is a different rock.

What about that second rock?

Num 20:7 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Num 20:8 "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."

Num 20:9 So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him.

Num 20:10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"

Num 20:11 Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.

Num 20:12 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

Because Moses disobeyed, striking the rock and not simply speaking to it, he and Aaron were prohibited from entering the Promised Land.

Commentators are in general agreement that since the rock is a type of Jesus, stricken at Calvary, that He was only to be struck once. After His death, the Holy Spirit would be given, of which the water from the second rock was a type.

Moses' disobedience, accompanied by anger, thus misrepresented God and His grace to the nation. Misrepresenting God is serious.

Despite the complaining and the contention of the Israelites, and despite the misrepresentation by Moses, on both occasions God provided the needed water.

The people got what they did not deserve: Grace on top of grace.

You've come and listened to a story about a man named Moses. It's about you, too, and the Rock Who was Jesus - struck for you that you might live.

Speak to Him.