

## EXODUS 17:1-22 1-14-18

### *Jesus of Rephidim*

We are in week three of our study of the middle portion of the book of Exodus. Today we come to the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter. Today we will read it bit by bit. **1** *Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink.* Here they come, a million and a half of them, marching around the desert and they set up camp at this place called Rephidim where there was no water. It was a dry place. Now, if you are thinking that Moses was pretty stupid to lead the people here, be careful. It was not Moses who led the people there. How does it say they got there? By the command of the Lord. God was leading them to this dry place. Are you in a dry place right now? Are you frustrated because nothing in your life seems to satisfy? Don't presume that you went wrong somewhere; there is a good chance God led you there. God sometimes leads His people to some barren locations. He puts us in positions that test our faith and require us to trust Him. The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 63:**1** *O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.* Where is it He says his soul seeks after God? In the dry place. There we are taught critical spiritual lessons as we are put to the test.

Now, the children of Israel, of course, by now, having experienced all those miraculous plagues in Egypt and the Passover miracle, and the parting of the Red Sea and the provision of manna, by now they were giants of faith and when they were confronted with this latest test they were ready. They had learned to simply turn their hearts toward heaven and thankfully call on God to provide their needs with abundance. NOT! Look at verse 2 for the real story, and as you do, ask yourself this --if the Old Testament is just a book produced by the Hebrew people to celebrate their past and honor their heroes why in the world would they make themselves look so bad? **2-3** *Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may 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 they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"* You have heard this before haven't you? Same song, second verse. Fortunately for them they had a leader who was walking with God. Moses responds to their awful grumblings and their bitter attacks the same way he did last time. **4a** *So Moses cried out to the Lord.* Moses takes it to the Lord in prayer. He casts

His cares on the Lord. **4** *So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me."* Water they lacked, stones they didn't. **5** *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. God sends Moses after His staff. Some versions call it his rod. This was the big stick shepherds used for walking and guiding the sheep and fighting the enemies. But this was no ordinary rod. This rod was to Moses like his sword was to Zorro, like his bow to Robin Hood, like his gun to the Sundance Kid, like the laser saber to Luke Skywalker. This staff was the one by which God brought low the Pharaoh of Egypt. It was the rod of miracles. It was called the *rod of God*. When God told Moses to pick up his rod you knew something special was about to happen. **6-7** *Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at 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. **7** *He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?"**

Let's cover quickly the basic lesson of the story and then I'll get to the more intriguing prophetic lesson of the story. The basic lesson is the same one we had last week. It is simply and profoundly this: God will meet the needs of His people. In chapter 16 they needed food; there was no normal means of supply and God miraculously provided manna. In this chapter they needed water and again, in the absence of natural supply God provided. He is showing Himself faithful and true to a nation of grumblers He was calling His *chosen* people. That's the basic point and for you who are anxious today, wondering how things will work out, wondering how you are going to survive, look and listen, God won't let His chosen ones down. He didn't bring you this far to leave you stranded.

Beyond the basic lesson of the story there is a prophetic lesson to be grasped. Now, I'm not the kind of guy to read in all kinds of fanciful interpretations into the Old Testament where every place and event has some great and eternal spiritual significance but you don't have to for this one. It is there! The parallels may be less than obvious but they are intended. Here they are: first the rock. What does the rock represent? What spiritual reality does it point to? That rock, like the manna, points to Jesus Christ. Jesus, like the rock, is the source of spiritual water to His people. And, once again I can assure you this is not just my interpretation. This is the interpretation of Scripture by Scripture. I Corinthians 10:**1-3** *I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our*

*fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food. We spoke of that last week. **4** And all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. To take the typography a step further, when was it that the rock gave forth life? When did the water gush forth? When the rock was struck. How does Jesus give life to His people? Through His death, by being smitten of God and afflicted in our place. Isaiah 53:**4-5** Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. The nation of Israel was preserved alive because that Rock was struck by the rod of God in Rephidim. We now are preserved alive because the Rock of Ages was smitten of God at Calvary.*

Let's carry it all a bit further. If Christ represents the Rock, to what may we compare the water which flowed from it? What does it symbolize? Listen to what Jesus says about the water He gives. This is the dialogue between Jesus and the woman at the well. Jesus, had asked this woman for a drink of water and she started asking him why a nice Jew like Him would be at a well with her. And Jesus responds this way in John 4:**10-14** (NLT) *"If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."*<sup>11</sup> *"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? 12 And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?" 13 Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. 14 But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."* Does that remind you of anything? Remember last week we read from John 6 where Jesus spoke in the same way about the manna, and called Himself the Bread of Heaven? Now He is the Well of Life, offering the Water of Life which is Living. Living beings have the power of regeneration within themselves. You cut my hair, it grows back. I can't say that for all of you brothers but you get the point. Jesus is talking about a water that won't run out because it is alive and it gives a person, says Jesus, eternal life. What's the water? Look at John 7:**37** *Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. And what does it mean to drink of Jesus? The same that it means to eat of Him. It means putting your faith in Him. **38** He*

*who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'*” What an incredible image! The one who believes in Jesus Christ will be filled with a living water which can satisfy the soul and can wash the heart. What is that water? **39a** *This He spoke of the Spirit.* The water which flowed out to the salvation of Israel is the Holy Spirit who now lives in every true believer. Isn't that magnificent?! All Israel tasted of that water. All who belong to Jesus drink of His Spirit. This gift is not for a few but for all who believe. I Corinthians 12:**13c** *We were all made to drink of one Spirit.* God's word is such a treasure and so confirms our faith. Do you see the connection between Exodus and John? Written over 1000 years apart, in different languages and different cultures, they teach the same lesson and point to the same Savior. How can that be? The Author of History is the Author of this book and is the Author of our salvation. Alright, now let's go back to Exodus and part two of our look at chapter 17.

Apparently, soon after this provision of water, verse **8** *Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim.* Wait a second! I thought that if you belong to God and you are following His will that everything was going to be smooth and easy. I was told that we would just sail through life on wings of eagles. I thought being a Christian would give me a life of peace, what is this stuff about being attacked and going to war? Thus may some poorly-taught Christians complain when opposition arises. God says in response, “I beg your pardon... Who knows the next line?” Say it with me, “I never promised you a rose garden.” And He didn't. The invitation of Jesus to His disciples often times was simply, “Come with me and suffer.” When Paul was baptized it says God showed him how much he must suffer for Christ's name. The invitation of Jesus is an invitation to a cross; it is an invitation to a life of opposition to evil. There is a promise of peace but it is a peace found in the context of spiritual warfare. II Timothy 3:**12** *All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* If you really want to follow Christ you can count on being opposed, on being attacked. Now, why does this happen? We don't mean to harm anyone. What provokes it? The same thing that provoked the Amalekites. The people of God are a threat to the world. We tend to make unbelievers nervous and the larger our numbers the more nervous and defensive they get. So, here in Exodus, you have the people of God in large numbers on the move and the sons of Amalek were getting jittery, so they attacked. Probably out of fear. Maybe too they were after that source of water the Hebrews had. Water was more valuable than oil in those days and the source of many battles. So, in envy or fear, or whatever the children of this world attack the children of God.

Now, look at what Moses does. **9** *So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”* A decade ago I probably would have said nothing about this verse, but given our present social climate it’s worth a few minutes. Who in Israel was chosen for military service? What did Moses say? *Choose men.* Moses must have been a bigoted, sexist homophobe. Choose men?! Come on, what about equal rights? Why don’t you just open up the military for whomever would like to participate? The answer, of course, is that Moses was not enlightened like so many today. Moses came out of the old school where they taught that armies were to kill people and break things. He didn’t understand the role of the military as an instrument of social progress. And maybe that explains why his armies won so much. Many in our day are seeking to obliterate any perceived distinctions between the genders. But those distinctions are real. Our women, our ladies, are not to be drafted into the military to fulfill someone’s social agenda. The concern must always be military effectiveness. What’s the best way to win wars? If that’s an all-male fighting force fine, if that’s an all hetero fighting force – fine. Get the lobbyists out of the way and let’s let General Patton or General Moses, have the final word.

No, but we need to move on. Moses said, “Joshua, you get up an army and go fight. I’ll go up to the hill.” You wonder what Joshua thought when he heard that. “You are going to what? You’re going up in the bleachers while I have to risk my neck?” Well, if he thought it he didn’t say it? **10** *Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.* Just briefly I would point out here that armies and churches function best when everyone understands the diversity of jobs and roles which must be filled. Not everybody works on the battle plans. Not everybody throws a spear. Each to his own proper role. Some in the valley, some on the hill, some back in camp with the children. But each doing his job with courage and effort. Now catch how this story goes **11-12** *So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses’ hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set.* Remember he took with him that super-fantastic miracle wand. He held up in His hand the rod of God. **13** *So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.* Question, what was the connection between what Moses did and what Joshua did? It’s hard to see isn’t it? It’s an invisible connection but it is obviously there and it is a connection that runs through heaven. The

fighting of Joshua was joined with the blessing of God so long as Moses kept those hands up. There is a great lesson for us here. It pertains to the two sides of a Christian's sword, the side of prayer and the side of activism. Have you ever taken a personality profile? A DISC or Myer-Briggs test? I find those tests highly useful but also highly annoying because they are forced answer tests. They ask you questions like, "If someone you love is sick would you pray for him or take him to the doctor?" I mean, how does a Christian answer that? You could have asked Moses, "When attacked by a foreign army what do you do? Pray or fight?" And what would Moses have said? He would have said, "I'll pray, Joshua will fight." But both are important right? That's the lesson of this passage. What I'm saying assumes you understand that as Moses stood on the hill he held up the rod of God which represented God's power and he interceded for his nation. And the intercession of Moses, even the symbolic display of the power of Jehovah was critical to their success. Now, almost everybody thinks the only factors that matter in a battle are the visible ones, of who has the greatest force and who has the sharpest spears and who is better situated and so on. Everybody believes you win by human might and human effort and obviously there is a lot of truth to that but it's not the whole truth. Psalm 33:**16-17** *The king is not saved by a mighty army; a warrior is not delivered by great strength. 17 A horse is a false hope for victory; nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength.* Instead says the psalmist **20** *Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield.* So, how does the man of God approach his warfare? Psalm 44 gives us a great word, speaking of the Hebrews it says **3-8** *For by their own sword they did not possess the land, and their own arm did not save them, but Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your presence, for You favored them. 4 You are my King, O God; command victories for Jacob. 5 Through You we will push back our adversaries; through Your name we will trample down those who rise up against us. 6 For I will not trust in my bow, nor will my sword save me. 7 But You have saved us from our adversaries, and You have put to shame those who hate us. 8 In God we have boasted all day long, and we will give thanks to Your name forever.* That is the lesson God was teaching Israel in their first major battle. That is why He had Moses hold up the rod of God. He wanted to dramatically communicate to His people that human ingenuity and human strength would not be the key to victory. They must look unto Him. They must put their hope in God.

Practically speaking what does that mean? What that means is you pray. We express our dependence on God by prayer, when we bow before Him to call on His name and for His help. Prayer is not a waste of time. Some people really see it that way. They say, "Don't stand around

praying, get in the fight.” Was Moses in the fight? You bet he was. That is why we use the term, *Prayer Warrior*. The spiritual man recognizes that there is a battle going on behind the battle and he fights with spiritual weapons on his knees in prayer. And this isn’t just for times we feel desperate. The people of Israel, going into their first battle, were probably scared silly. There would be no overconfidence this time, but just keep reading. After a few great victories a certain cockiness sets in that suggests we can do it without God now. We can win without praying, so why bother. That can happen in a church. Well, we have all these fine programs and fine buildings now and a staff of paid workers, we don’t need God anymore. So, we hold prayer meetings and only a few come. There is a danger for churches that come to trust in their own machinery of ministry rather than in the Holy Spirit. Beware and keep those praying hands lifted to heaven. Maybe even join our prayer class during the Sunday School hour.

Now, to the other side. I hope you can see that what Moses did was critical. I hope you can see the absolute need for divine help and the need therefore to pray, but I hope as well you can see that Joshua’s role is still necessary. Dependence and activity are not incompatible ideas. We aren’t to let go and let God, we are to trust God and get going. We can’t be like some hyper-spiritual folks who tell us we mustn’t fight, we only trust in God. It just so happens the God we are told to trust in commands us to fight! He expects us to move out and seek to be the answer to our own prayers. Spurgeon writes, *Prayer is a downright mockery if it does not lead us into the practical use of means likely to promote the ends for which we pray*. Often we see this at work in our illnesses. What shall I do, pray about it or see the doctor? The answer usually is what? You do both. Seeing a doctor is no betrayal of trust in God anymore than it was for Joshua to carry a sword into battle. Please don’t make this error. The opposite error is more common, but I see enough of this error as well. “We don’t need an evangelism program, let’s just pray for the lost. We don’t need a stewardship program to raise money, let’s just pray and God will provide. We don’t need to be active politically, let’s just pray for our leaders and God will straighten things out.” There was probably somebody like that in Israel raggin on Joshua saying, “Hey, Joshua, don’t you know our warfare is not against flesh and blood...” There is a truth to that brethren, but when applied like that it’s a false dichotomy. I remind you that a sword has two sides and we had best be prepared to use them both. Dependence and activism, intelligent effort and fervent prayer are not incompatible but are in fact the dynamic duo that can conquer in Jesus name and in His power.

Finally, I point again today, as last time, to Jesus. He is the Manna. He is the Rock. He is also our Moses and our Joshua. Did you know that Jesus intercedes for his people? Jesus stands before God and holds up His nail-pierced hands to defend you against the enemy. Charles Wesley wrote a wonderful hymn about this priestly work of Jesus. It's "Arise My Soul Arise." *Arise, my soul, arise; shake off thy guilty fears; the bleeding Sacrifice in my behalf appears: before the throne my Surety stands, my name is written on His hands. 2 He ever lives above, for me to intercede. 3 Five bleeding wounds He bears, received on Calvary; they pour effectual pray'rs, they strongly plead for me: 4 The Father hears Him pray, His dear anointed One; He cannot turn away the presence of his Son.* I got a phone call once about midnight from someone asking me to pray about an emergency situation. I've learned that people like to know their pastor is praying for them. There is comfort in that. How much better though to know that Jesus is praying for us. In Luke 22 Jesus spoke of this to his friend Simon Peter. **31-32a** "*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you. 32* **32** *But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.* Man, to realize that I stand by the prayers and intercession of Jesus. It makes me ready to get out in the battle and fight for my King. In that way Jesus is like Moses.

But do you see how Jesus is also like Joshua? Their names are the same. Joshua and Jesus both mean *Deliverer, Savior*. And both are depicted as military leaders. They lead the charge against the forces of darkness. Revelation 19:**11** *I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.* Jesus wages war for us now against our invisible foes and someday against the visible ones as well. What was it the Lord was called in Exodus 15? 15:**3** *The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name.* You have enemies? Get Jesus fighting for you and praying for you and you will be a super-conqueror.

Did you know Exodus 17 was all about Jesus? He is everywhere isn't He? I'm not making this up. This book is all about Jesus, and when you read it rightly it will constantly point you back to Him. In John 5:39 Jesus said **39** *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me.* Of what do the Old Testament Scriptures bear witness? Of Jesus. They point you to Him and so do I. Don't look to the church for salvation. Don't look to government as the answer to your problems. Don't look to your own strength, your own ingenuity, look to Jesus. If He says, "Fight" then fight but do all things in reliance on Him. Let's look to Him now in prayer.

