

# Tuesday Morning Bible Study with Ted

Exodus 17:1-13  
March 23, 2021

Exodus 17:1-3. But there was no water for the people to drink

*1. All the congregation of the children of Israel traveled from the wilderness of Sin, by their journeys, according to Yahweh's commandment, and encamped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink. 2. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test Yahweh?" 3. The people were thirsty for water there; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?"*

**1a. "All the congregation of the children of Israel traveled from the wilderness of Sin, by their journeys, according to Yahweh's commandment**

The wilderness of Sin was located between Elim and Sinai (16:1), but we do not know its exact location. The word Sin in "the wilderness of Sin" might be related to the Hebrew word for Sinai, but is not related to our word "sin."

Journeying by stages the Israelites would need a source of water at each resting place, because people and livestock require significant amounts of water every day—far too much to carry.

**1b. "and encamped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink**

Rephidim is their last camping place before Mount Sinai, so the mountain must be close.

At Marah, the water was bitter (15:23). At Rephidim, there is no water.

**2a. "Therefore the people quarreled with Moses, and said, 'Give us water to drink**

The Hebrew word for quarreled is often translated as "plead" or "strive" or contend" or "debate."

It is often used in a legal sense to describe a legal complaint. In this case, the people issue their complaint against Moses, demanding that he give them water to drink.

In verse 7, the word *rib* will be incorporated into the word, Meribah.

**2b. "Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test Yahweh?'**

Moses makes it clear that their quarrel is not with him, but with Yahweh.

3. "The people were thirsty for water there; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?'

Gerald asked what it was like to be without water during the recent sub-zero weather. Other experiences?

We need to balance their concerns with the fact that Yahweh has saved the Israelites over and over again. I think they have cause for fear—but also have cause for faith.

These people accuse Moses of bringing them out of Egypt to kill them.

Do you think they doubt his motives as well as his leadership?  
Where do you see it happen?

#### Exodus 17:4-7. Strike the rock

*4. Moses cried to Yahweh, saying, "What shall I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5. Yahweh said to Moses, "Walk on before the people, and take the elders of Israel with you, and take the rod in your hand with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb. You shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7. He called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because the children of Israel quarreled, and because they tested Yahweh, saying, "Is Yahweh among us, or not?"*

4. "Moses cried to Yahweh, saying, 'What shall I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me'

As he routinely does when faced with a crisis, Moses turns to Yahweh for relief. He asks what he should do, because he fears that the people will stone him.

We need to keep in mind that this is before the giving of the Jewish law, but this passage would have been recorded after the giving of the law. This causes some grief among the commentaries who believe stoning should not be mentioned here.

5. "Yahweh said to Moses, 'Walk on before the people, and take the elders of Israel with you, and take the rod in your hand with which you struck the Nile, and go'

How does our phrase "fight or flight" apply here?  
Yahweh tells Moses to do neither, but he does suggest that:

He is to move to the front of the people to reaffirm his status as their leader.

He is to take the elders with him, both to confirm his leadership and to act as witnesses of the miracle that is about to occur.

He is to take the staff which Yahweh has enabled Moses and Aaron to use in miraculous ways. So far, we have encountered the staff several times: 4:1-6; 7:10-12; 8:5-7, 16-17; 9:23; 10:13; 14:15-31.

#### 6A. "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb

Horeb is where Moses encountered the burning bush to begin his journey as Yahweh's agent (3:1-6).

The Hebrew word *horeb* means “a desolate region” or “ruin.” Sinai and Horeb are different names for the same mountain. Where a distinction appears, the mountain itself is Sinai and the neighboring wilderness area bears the wider designation Horeb. There is much confusion among the commentaries.

6b. “You shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.” Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel

As noted before, in the Numbers account, Moses was supposed to speak to the rock but struck it instead, and was punished for his disobedience. In this account, Yahweh orders him to strike the rock, and Moses obeys. The elders serve as witnesses to the miracle.

7. “He called the name of the place Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarreling), because the children of Israel quarreled , and because they tested Yahweh, saying, ‘Is Yahweh among us, or not?’

It appears that this verse brings together the names of two places to illustrate the inclination of the Israelites to test and quarrel with Yahweh.

Exodus 17:8. Amalek fought with Israel

*8. Then Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. 9. Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us, and go out to fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with God’s rod in my hand.” 10. So Joshua did as Moses had told him, and fought with Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11. When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed. When he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. 12. But Moses’ hands were heavy; so they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side. His hands were steady until sunset. 13. Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.*

8. “Then Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.”

Gerald has pointed out the Hebrew connections. Here are some sources: Amalek was the grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:12). The Amalekites who fight with Israel in this verse would be his descendants. There was (and would continue to be) ongoing conflict between Jacob and Esau—Israel and Edom.

Exodus 17:9-10 Moses said to Joshua

*9. Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us, and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with God’s rod in my hand. 10 So Joshua did as Moses had told him, and fought with Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.*

9a. “Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose men for us, and go out, fight with Amalek’

Joshua will be Moses’ successor, and will lead the Israelites into the Promised Land (Joshua 3). This is the first mention of his name in the Hebrew scriptures, and he is clearly subordinate to Moses.

Moses commands Joshua to “choose men for us” to fight the Amalekites. This implies that Joshua is to choose a select group to fight the battle.

Moses doesn't provide criteria for Joshua to use in making the selection. There is no hint of the manner in which Joshua chose the men.

#### **9b. "Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with God's rod in my hand"**

We aren't told the name of the hill, I don't think it's important. In battle, the high ground confers advantage. Standing on the hilltop, Moses will have a clear view of the battle, and the Israelite soldiers will have a clear view of him and his staff.

Moses will hold God's rod in his hand:

The rod that became a snake when Moses threw it to the ground at Yahweh's direction (4:2-4; 7:8-12)

The rod that Moses used to strike the Nile River, turning its water to blood (7:20-21).

Possibly the rod that Aaron stretched over the waters of Egypt, creating a plague of frogs (8:5-7)

Possibly the rod that Aaron stretched over the dust of Egypt, creating a plague of lice (8:16-19).

The rod that Moses stretched over Egypt, creating a plague of locusts (10:12-17).

The rod that Moses stretched over the Red Sea, dividing the waters (14:15-25) and once again to bring the waters together, trapping the Egyptian soldiers (14:26-28).

But the rod is not the secret of success. It is God who uses the rod to demonstrate his power.

#### **10. "So Joshua did as Moses had told him, and fought with Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill**

Joshua obeyed Moses' order and led the battle against Amalek.

Aaron and Hur accompany Moses to the top of the hill, and stay with him through the battle. These are not young men. Not much earlier, Moses' age was given as eighty, and Aaron's at eighty-three (7:7). We don't know Hur's age. Age is a significant aspect of this story, because these three men will be responsible for keeping the rod elevated throughout the battle—and I can tell you that older men have less physical strength than young men.

Aaron is Moses' brother and assumed a significant leadership role along with Moses during preparations for the Exodus. He is a descendent of Levi (6:16-25).

Yahweh will appoint him as the priest in charge of the Levites (Numbers 3:5-10).

Aaron will assume an unfortunate role in the golden calf incident that we will see in Exodus 32.

We know much less about Hur. Moses will assign Hur as co-leader with Aaron until such time as Moses returns from the top of the mountain.

#### **Exodus 17:11-13. When Moses held up his hands**

*11. It happened, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. 12. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side. His hands were steady until sunset. 13. Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.*

11. "It happened, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed

These verses don't mention the rod, but in verse 9, Moses said that he would stand on the hill with the rod in his hand, and he surely does that now with rod raised high.

We can assume Moses held his hand high holding the rod while Israel prevailed. When he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

But it is neither Moses' hand nor the rod that is important, but the God who empowers both Moses and the rod.

12. "But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side. His hands were steady until sunset

Remember the movie "An Officer and a Gentleman" when Richard Gere's character was told to hold buckets of water in a particular position for a prolonged period of time. It's an example of what truly happens as discipline in military training.

So imagine eighty-year-old Moses trying to hold his hand aloft (with or without rod) during the battle. Before long, his hands became heavy and he needed help. Aaron and Hur moved a stone into position so Moses could sit, but that was only a temporary fix.

Aaron and Hur make a second effort. This time, Aaron holds one of Moses' hands aloft, and Hur the other. They maintain that until sunset. I think of that as a heroic effort on the part of Aaron (eighty-three years old) and Hur (?).

13. "Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword

This verse credits Joshua with the victory over Amalek, but we must remember Moses' role—and Aaron and Hur's role. But, of course, it was God who enabled them to win the battle.

#### AN AFTERTHOUGHT:

Exodus 17:14-15. Moses built an altar

14. *Yahweh said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under the sky."* 15. *Moses built an altar, and called its name Yahweh our Banner. He said, "Yah has sworn: 'Yahweh will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.*

14. Yahweh promises to utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under the sky"

Later Yahweh will tell Saul to destroy the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:3).

David will take spoils from Amalek (2 Samuel 8:12).

15. "Moses built an altar, and called its name Yahweh our Banner"

In those days, armies used banners to identify soldiers on the field of battle. They used banners to rally the troops—and to signal victory over the enemy.

In this verse, the altar serves to identify Yahweh, rally the Israelites, and signal victory over the enemy.

16. "Yah has sworn: 'Yahweh will have war with Amalek from generation to generation'

Yahweh doesn't say that Israel will have war with Amalek, but that Yahweh will do so. But Israel, as Yahweh's covenant people, will be involved.

#### YOUR THOUGHTS AND COMMENTS...

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