

The LORD had tested the Israelites at Marah. They expected to replenish their water supplies, only to find the water was bitter. They looked to Moses for the solution. God showed Moses the answer that He had prepared in advance, a log that would make the water sweet.

As we go on through the record of the Exodus, we find that even though they accuse God of bringing them out in the desert to starve them, He didn't really rebuke the people at all. God was humbling them and teaching them that man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from His mouth. If they would listen to God, He would be their healer. Are we living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God? (Deuteronomy 8:3)

God will discipline them more severely and the reason He does so is related to the tests. God does not give us tests so that HE can learn how we are doing. He gives us tests so that WE can learn how we are doing. When the state of our heart is manifest, we should seriously consider what needs to change and how that change might come about. (James 1:23-25)

My son works for a company that helps those studying for a CPA license by giving them tests. The tests are to show them where they are weak and need more study. The tests aren't to condemn them, but to help them improve and eventually pass the real exam.

God gives us tests. At our Wednesday night Bible study, someone asked what the difference was between test and temptation. A temptation is to lure us into sin and destruction. A test is to reveal our weakness that we might improve. God never tempts us. James tells us that is not in His nature. (James 1:13) Satan tempts. God tests. One is meant to bring you to ruin. The other is meant to open your eyes to your weakness.

Sometimes, as we are being tested, the enemy of our soul will tempt us. (1Peter 5:8) That is what happened in the wilderness of Sin. God was testing them to teach them how little they looked to God for their needs. Satan was tempting them to give up and head back to the secure abundance of the Nile. Satan wanted them to go back to serving Pharaoh instead of God. There was a test and a temptation. They come from different sources and for different reasons.

This church is going through a test. In that test there are temptations. The tests are to teach. The temptations are to destroy. Learn from the tests. Reject the temptations. (1Peter 5:9)

Commented [Paul Wall1]: Deuteronomy 8:3 (ESV)
3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Commented [Paul Wall2]: James 1:23-25 (ESV)
23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.
24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.
25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Commented [Paul Wall3]: James 1:13 (ESV)
13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

Commented [Paul Wall4]: 1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)
8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Commented [Paul Wall5]: 1 Peter 5:9 (ESV)
9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

After receiving the quail and the daily manna, the cloud led them little by little to Rephidim. 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, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.*

They moved at the commandment of the LORD. The LORD said to follow His Presence in the cloud. When they cloud moved, they were to move. The cloud was a Theophany, a manifestation of God. In a sense, it was Immanuel, God with them. To follow the cloud was to obey the commandment of the LORD. It carries the idea of walking with the LORD, of following Him through life. We might think they were blessed to have something physical to follow, and they were, but remember the cloud has now led them to three places of frightening uncertainty. (Acts 14:22)

It's not so different today. In Christ, we try to follow His word and His will for our life, and yet we face the same type of situations that we feel are disastrous. We can't see the answer or the reason. We begin to doubt whether or not we are following God as we should. We ask ourselves, "Is God mad at us for some reason we aren't aware? Is this illness or that conflict the result of my sin?" (Psalm 119:75)

That is something we should consider. But often it is a test. It reveals how much we really trust the LORD. It shows us where our trust is placed. Yes, there are those times that we will not understand what it is all about, and yet we trust God and wait on His Word. (Psalm 139:23-24)

Now they have come to Rephidim. It means resting places. Some believe this is Wady Fairan. If so, then it is long row palms and tamarisk trees at the base of tall cliffs. It often runs with water. This time it was dry! Didn't God know that? Did He intentionally lead them to another point of desperate need? Yes! He is testing them again.

When we don't learn the material the first time through, we need to be taught again and tested again. Will they now look to the LORD? Will they wait on His word? Will we?

Unfortunately for them, they showed they had not learned from Marah. They repeated the same sinful actions at the wilderness of Sin, by blaming Moses and maligning him. 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?"*

They were turning the test around and instead of learning from the test, they decided they would test God. (Deuteronomy 33:8) We would not understand

Commented [Paul Wall6]: Acts 14:22 (ESV)
22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Commented [Paul Wall7]: Psalm 119:75 (ESV)
75 I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Commented [Paul Wall8]: Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV)
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Commented [Paul Wall9]: Deuteronomy 33:8 (ESV)
8 And of Levi he said, "Give to Levi your Thummim, and your Urim to your godly one, whom you tested at Massah, with whom you quarreled at the waters of Meribah;

completely what was happening here without verse 7 and other passages that explain it for us. The people hardened their hearts, like Pharaoh did. They asked if God was really among them. They demanded that if He really was, that He perform for them according to His covenant and do so right now! They were putting God to a test. The test was for them, but they flipped it around and said, "No, the test is for God! If He is really with us, then provide water!"

Scripture will look back to this and denounce it as a defiant and rebellious act. (Deuteronomy 9:22) Jesus will quote to Satan, "Do not put the LORD your God to a test." (Matthew 4:7) God doesn't need to be taught anything. He has no blind spots. **To test Him is to say He is in error and needs to improve.** The Israelites were really saying, "God, you've failed to give us water when we need it. Keep your covenant with us or we'll stone your representative!!"

This is a major lesson for the Israelites and for us. When we demand that God perform for us to prove Himself, we are reversing roles with God. We are taking the place of the Creator as judge and putting God on trial.

Here is an eternal truth that we are reminded of by King Ahaz (Isaiah 7:12), by a psalmist (Psalm 78:41), by Jesus (Luke 4:12), and by the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 3:8-9). **Man does not test God! God tests us. Tests are to expose our imperfections and help us grow. We are not to test God by demanding that He serve us at our whim.**

"God if you are really there then ..." God is really there whether you get the answer you want or not! Just because God doesn't act the way we think He should does not change the reality of who He is or who we are. He is still all-knowing God (Hebrews 4:13), and we are still limited creatures with imperfect knowledge. (1Corinthians 13:12)

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?" Here they go again with an accusation we will hear until that generation dies off. They have a real need. The young, the elderly, the animals, all need water. They haven't learned from the last tests that in times of need we are to look to our heavenly Father, present our need, and wait for His word.

I don't know if anything is more hurtful to a godly leader than to have those they serve malign their motives. There is no way to defend oneself, for they have already seen your sacrificial service but chosen to add the motivations they have imagined. Moses could not rip out his heart and show it to them. All he could do was continue to meekly serve them and hope they would one day be willing to be honest with what they observed. Moses is serving the people at God's leading, not his own or theirs.

Commented [Paul Wall10]: Deuteronomy 9:22 (ESV) 22 "At Taberah also, and at Massah and at Kibroth-hattaavah you provoked the LORD to wrath.

Commented [Paul Wall11]: Matthew 4:7 (ESV) 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

Commented [Paul Wall12]: Isaiah 7:12 (ESV) 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test."

Commented [Paul Wall13]: Psalm 78:41 (ESV) 41 They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel.

Commented [Paul Wall14]: Luke 4:12 (ESV) 12 And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

Commented [Paul Wall15]: Hebrews 3:8-9 (ESV) 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works

Commented [Paul Wall16]: Hebrews 4:13 (ESV) 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Commented [Paul Wall17]: 1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV) 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." Do you remember how tenaciously Moses tried to get out of accepting this role? (Exodus 4:13) It may have been fear of Pharaoh, but it also may be that he had tried before and had his motives maligned. (Exodus 2:14) Remember, "Will you kill me as you killed the Egyptian? Who made you a ruler over us?" After all the miracles and proofs that YHWH is God and Moses is His chosen leader, they are still unchanged.

Commented [Paul Wall18]: Exodus 4:13 (ESV)
13 But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."

Commented [Paul Wall19]: Exodus 2:14 (ESV)
14 He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known."

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 the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. When we studied the role of elders in the church last January, we noticed that it went all the way back to the Exodus. God has always used individuals to lead, but these individuals are not above anyone or over one another. Moses is one of them. He is in the lead, but we will see later that the Spirit that is on Him will be on the other elders as well. (Numbers 11:17)

Commented [Paul Wall20]: Numbers 11:17 (ESV)
17 And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.

With such a large group, not everyone would see what was about to take place. The event will be very significant, so the elders will be a witness to convey it to the rest of the congregation. In that sense, the church is the same today, only we have the Great Shepherd, Jesus, as the head Shepherd. The elders serve the congregation at His leading. (Hebrews 13:17)

Commented [Paul Wall21]: Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)
17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

The same rod that brought judgment on the Egyptian gods and turned the Nile water into blood is now about to provide water in the desert. God told Moses, ⁶ Behold, 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.

It sounds like the cloud went and hovered over the rock at Horeb to show Moses which rock to strike. The LORD was definitely among them! In front of the elders as witnesses, Moses struck that rock and water poured out in sufficient quantity for the Israelites.

An interesting aside is that Rephidim also can also mean "low places". If this was a place of low elevation in the wilderness, the water would have formed a lake which the people and herds could gather around.

The Apostle Paul tells us this was another picture of Christ. (1Corinthians 10:4) The Old Testament refers to God as our rock. (Genesis 49:24) It implies an unchanging place or firm foundation on which to build.

Commented [Paul Wall22]: 1 Corinthians 10:4 (ESV)
4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

But what does it mean that the rock was struck with that rod of judgment and from it came a river of water? Halfway chronologically between Moses and Jesus came Isaiah, who filled in the picture. He prophesied, ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God,

Commented [Paul Wall23]: Genesis 49:24 (ESV)
24 yet his bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

and afflicted. ⁵ *But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.* ⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* (Isaiah 53:4-6 ESV)

That rock, Christ Jesus, had our iniquities placed upon Him, and because He took our place, He was smitten by God's rod of judgment that we might be saved. The same Hebrew word is used in both texts, *naka*, to smite. The same Hebrew words to strike and smite were used in applying the blood to the doorframe of the Israelites' homes. They were struck and smitten with the blood of the lamb. (Exodus 12:22)

As Moses struck the rock before witnesses that were to convey what happened to others, so Jesus was struck and raised with witnesses that were to proclaim it to others. (Acts 2:32) As water that gave life to the thirsty multitude flowed in abundance from the rock, so the water of life flows from Jesus springing up within the one who places their trust in Him. (John 4:14) He was struck once for us all that we might live and not die. (Hebrews 10:12-14)

As we wander through the wilderness of life, we come to the wilderness of Sin. We expected to find satisfaction in the natural, but it was dry and unsatisfying. We knew we must have a spiritual drink or die of thirst. We may have even complained that God had not met our need. Then along came a witness, someone who saw that the rock was struck for us, to give us the water of life. We come to the water and drink our fill, and there is more than enough. Our spiritual thirst is satisfied. Will we remember next time to look to the Lord? (Isaiah 51:1)

Sometimes we look to the elders. They can share their water with you, but they are not the source. The rock that was smitten is the source. They are just here to point you to the rock, to remind you it is the source.

⁷ *And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"* Testing and Quarreling were the names that would be remembered for this experience. Centuries later the psalmist would remind them of the experience. ⁸ *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 and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.* Psalm 95:8-9 (ESV)

The author of Hebrews tells us that the application in his day was for the new believers who wanted to return to a religion of works to avoid persecution. (Hebrews 3:11-14) We see the same today. People quarrel with God when they say they can't accept a God who would sacrifice His own Son. They quarrel

Commented [Paul Wall24]: Exodus 12:22 (ESV)
22 Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.

Commented [Paul Wall25]: Acts 2:32 (ESV)
32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

Commented [Paul Wall26]: John 4:14 (ESV)
14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Commented [Paul Wall27]: Hebrews 10:12-14 (ESV)
12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,
13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.
14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Commented [Paul Wall28]: Isaiah 51:1 (ESV)
1 "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.

Commented [Paul Wall29]: Hebrews 3:11-14 (ESV)
11 As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest." "
12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.
13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
14 For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

because they can't grasp the greatness of His love and the eternal nature of His existence. But even more, it's because of the hardness of their heart. They want God to perform on their own terms. They want to quarrel with God and have Him fit their preconceived idea of what He should be like.

The believer can do the same. We want God to act in certain ways in our time, and we ignore what He is already doing and the way He is doing it. It is a hardening of our heart and another way to test God. Henry Blackaby reminds us that we are to be like Jesus in watching what God is doing and joining Him, not think up a plan and ask God to join us. (John 5:19)

At Marah God gave them a statute and a promise in response to their sin. He invited them to look to Him. Now, a short time later, the test is repeated. Now they get a warning. Don't quarrel with or test God. As we grow, a little more is expected of us. Another test is coming on the heels of this one. God is drilling home the lessons for their good and ours as well. These things happened to them that we might not sin as they did. Paul wrote, ⁹ *We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents,* ¹⁰ *nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.* ¹¹ *Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.* ¹² *Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.* 1Corinthians 10:9-12 (ESV)

Yes, God is among us. He is our rock. He meets our spiritual thirst. He is our covenant God who bore the judgment we deserve that we might live. Let us never doubt that and test Him. Let us not harden our heart and quarrel with His holy justice. Let us look to Him and drink freely and often the water of life. (John 3:14-15)

Questions

- 1 What is the difference between a test and a temptation?
- 2 How are our tests similar to Israel's?
- 3 Why does God repeat tests?
- 4 How did the people test God? Do we?
- 5 How did they threaten God?
- 6 Why was Moses distraught?
- 7 Why did God have Moses bring the elders?
- 8 Who is the Rock of Israel?

Commented [Paul Wall30]: John 5:19 (ESV)
19 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."

Commented [Paul Wall31]: John 3:14-15 (ESV)
14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

9 What is the reality behind the picture?

10 How do people quarrel with God today?

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