

Exodus 17:1-16 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. 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?” 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?” ⁴ So Moses cried to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” 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. 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. 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?”

⁸ Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. ⁹ So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” ¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹ Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. ¹² But Moses’ hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. ¹³ And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. ¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” ¹⁵ And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord Is My Banner, ¹⁶ saying, “A hand upon the throne of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

Exodus 17 | Water, The Rock, Amalek

We return to the Exodus story for our third time. We began Exodus in the spring of 2024, picked up in the fall of 2025 and now we return into chapter 17 in the fall of 2026. Our story now picks up on the people of God in the wilderness on the other Side of their rescue from Egypt. The red sea has been parted by Moses and the people of God have triumphantly crossed to the other side. They have sung their song and encountered a few initial trials in the wilderness. God has made the bitter water they first encountered into sweet water, and he has satiated their hunger with bread from heaven.

The people of God are on their way to worship the Lord at Mt. Sinai but their trials in the wilderness are just beginning. Today we are looking at two stories, one is a story of the people turning against God and Moses because of their thirst. The other is a story of the people of God being attacked by an enemy they must fight in battle, the amalekites. It is the story of two quarrels and two tests. In each someone is struck, and the people of God are delivered.

1. Massah & Maribah

Exodus 17:1 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.

The Lord commanded his people to move on from the wilderness of Sin by stages and arrive at Rephidim. The wilderness of Sin is where the people complained that there was no food, they should have stayed in Egypt. God sends Manna from heaven and promises daily bread for his people. But having moved on from Sin, which sounds like Sinai, they arrive in Rephidim and in Rephidim there is no water. The first place they arrived in the wilderness the water was bitter. But the Lord made it sweet. In Rephidim there is no water.

Exodus 17:2 | 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?”

The people demand water from Moses. But Moses recognizes that this demand is a faithless quarreling with the Lord. Even a testing of the Lord. How should we think of this? I mean aren't they thirsty? Why does Moses frame this as a testing? Well you must consider breakfast. That morning in this wilderness of rocks they had bread from heaven for breakfast. And what the bread from heaven was meant to teach them was that God is the Lord their God. He will provide.

So it is a testing because rather than trust in the Lord according to his promises of provision, they bring the Lord on trial and they say that God is not with them. Here is what it means to test the Lord. If I'm teaching my children I write down a test, and I have the answer key. I had the test to my children, and I check them against the answers I have decided. This is what it means to test the Lord. It is to lay out your own assessment of God and then judge him according to your standard. Then if God passes you bless him, if he does not pass you judge him condemned.

Exodus 17:4 | So Moses cried to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

The people have mounted a mutiny against Moses. And the accusation is the same as the accusation in the wilderness of Sin. Why bring us out of Egypt to kill us all. Moses turns to the Lord wondering what he should do for this people, as they are ready to stone him.

Exodus 17:5 | 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.

This is a choice descriptor for Moses' staff. Not the staff you used to part the sea, or the staff that turned into a serpent. The staff you used to strike the Nile, which turned the river to blood. The staff which took the water away from Egypt. The people are set to strike Moses, Moses is walking before them with the staff which strikes the enemies of God. He is bringing the Elders who stood against Moses and he is carrying the staff. Somebody is going to get struck. The Lord's instruction continues.

Exodus 17:6 | 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.

The water begins to flow and the people think, "what just happened?" We were going to strike Moses if we didn't get water. Moses took the staff he used to strike the enemies of God. And the glory of the Lord stood on a rock, and Moses struck the rock. We were not struck, Moses was not struck, the Lord was struck, and we got water. What is the moral of this story? Moses named the place for the testing of the Lord, where the people asked, "is the Lord among us or not?" What does that question mean now?

2. Amalek

Exodus 17:8 | Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim.

Next Israel gets struck from behind. Moses recounts the strike in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 25:17-18 | "Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, ¹⁸ how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God.

The Amalekites are the first and last enemies of God. Descendant's of Esau they are particularly wicked in their attacks as they cut off the weary who are lagging behind. God does not forget this unprovoked attack on his people and will seek their utter destruction. This is their first attack.

Exodus 17:9 | So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."

Moses commissions his second in command to assemble the men. For the first time war is upon the people of God and they must defend themselves. Moses takes the staff of God and he stands on top of the hill overlooking the battle. Moses takes the staff, somebody is going to get struck. He assumes a position over the battle in a place where he might be visible to those engaged in the conflict. And Joshua takes his position with the troops amidst the conflict against the amalekites.

Exodus 17:11 | Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.

Yes, when Moses holds up the staff of God in his hand, Israel prevails over Amalek. When he lowers the staff of God the Amalekites prevail over Israel. Its a simple truth. When the Lord fights for us we prevail. When the Lord does not fight for us, we lose. Lest we think the power came from Moses the emphasis in the story is on Moses' weakness. He is an old man now, and he is unable to hold up the staff on his own.

Exodus 17:12 | But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

Aaron and Hur hold up Moses as he holds up the staff of the Lord against the enemies of Israel. By this method Joshua overwhelms Amalek driving the enemies of God into retreat. The point is that even through the fighting of Joshua, the people are victorious because of God. Moses raises a memorial here as the staff of God stuck the enemies of God's people.

Exodus 17:15-16 | And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord Is My Banner, ¹⁶ saying, "A hand upon the throne of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

Two stories. The people of God put Christ to the test and threaten to strike the chosen of God. But then God offers himself to be struck and provides for the people of God the water of life. Then when the people of God, who had treated God like he was their enemy, are struck. God strikes the enemies of his people. And he even makes an oath to see to it that the enemies of his people are destroyed.

So it's the day after the battle, the amalekites have been driven away and you kneel down to drink from the water flowing from the rock. Our first battle, can't believe we won. Well you saw Moses right? Yah the staff of God, strikes God's enemies. Like in Egypt. The Amalekites we're God's enemies? They were our enemies. If they're our enemies, God treats them like his enemies. Before the battle, when we didn't have water, I was hoping the elders would stone Moses. Yes but then Moses struck the Lord, the rock.

Paul interprets this for us in 1 Corinthians 10, the rock they drank from was Christ. Christ is of course God who was struck on our behalf that we might have peace with God and be filled with living water welling up to eternal life. We were the enemies of God, we should be struck, God was struck on our behalf. Why are we not enemies of the Lord, because of his grace. We are given this story so that we would not test the Lord.

Christ has been struck, so that we are the people of God.