
EXODUS 17:1 All the congregation of the children of Israel travelled from the wilderness of Sin, by their journeys, according to the LORD's commandment, and encamped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink.

The Israelites journey from the wilderness of Sin to Rephidim, Exo 17:1, where they murmur for lack of water, Exo 17:2, Exo 17:3. Moses asks counsel of God, Exo 17:4, who commands him to take his rod and smite the rock, Exo 17:5, and promises that water should proceed from it for the people to drink, Exo 17:6. The place is called Massah and Meribah, Exo 17:7. The Amalekites attack Israel in Rephidim, Exo 17:8. Joshua is commanded to fight with them, Exo 17:9. Moses, Aaron, and Hur go to the top of a hill, and while Moses holds up his hands, the Israelites prevail; when he lets them down, Amalek prevails, Exo 17:10, Exo 17:11. Moses, being weary, sits down, and Aaron and Hur hold up his hands, Exo 17:12. The Amalekites are totally routed, Exo 17:13, and the event commanded to be recorded, Exo 17:14. Moses builds an altar, and calls it Jehovah-Nissi, Exo 17:15. Amalek is threatened with continual wars, Exo 17:16.

Verse 1

Pitched in Rephidim - In Num 33:12-14 it is said, that when the Israelites came from Sin they encamped in Dophkah, and next in Alush, after which they came to Rephidim. Here, therefore, two stations are omitted, probably because nothing of moment took place at either. See the notes on Numbers 33 (note).

EXODUS 17:2 Therefore the people quarrelled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"

Verse 2

Why chide ye with me? - God is your leader, complain to him; Wherefore do ye tempt the Lord? As he is your leader, all your murmurings against me he considers as directed against himself; why therefore do ye tempt him? Has he not given you sufficient proofs that he can destroy his enemies and support his friends? And is he not among you to do you good? Exo 17:7. Why therefore do ye doubt his power and goodness, and thus provoke him to treat you as his enemies?

EXODUS 17:3 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?"

Verse 3

And the people murmured - The reader must not forget what has so often been noted relating to the degraded state of the minds of the Israelites. A strong argument however may be drawn from this in favor of their supernatural escape from Egypt. Had it been a scheme concerted by the heads

of the people, provision would necessarily have been made for such exigencies as these. But as God chose to keep them constantly dependent upon himself for every necessary of life, and as they had Moses alone as their mediator to look to, they murmured against him when brought into straits and difficulties, regretted their having left Egypt, and expressed the strongest desire to return. This shows that they had left Egypt reluctantly; and as Moses and Aaron never appear to have any resources but those which came most evidently in a supernatural way, therefore the whole exodus or departure from Egypt proves itself to have been no human contrivance, but a measure concerted by God himself.

EXODUS 17:4 Moses cried to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

EXODUS 17:5 The LORD 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.

EXODUS 17:6 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.

Verse 6

I will stand before thee there, upon the rock in Horeb - The rock, הַצֹּר hatstsur. It seems as if God had directed the attention of Moses to a particular rock, with which he was well acquainted; for every part of the mount and its vicinity must have been well known to Moses during the time he kept Jethro's flocks in those quarters. Dr. Priestley has left the following sensible observations upon this miracle: - "The luminous cloud, the symbol of the Divine presence, would appear on the rock, and Horeb was probably a part of the same mountain with Sinai. This supply of water, on Moses only striking the rock, where no water had been before nor has been since, was a most wonderful display of the Divine power. The water must have been in great abundance to supply two millions of persons, which excluded all possibility of artifice or imposture in the case. The miracle must also have been of some continuance, no doubt so long as they continued in that neighborhood, which was more than a year. There are sufficient traces of this extraordinary miracle remaining at this day. This rock has been visited, drawn, and described by Dr. Shaw, Dr. Pocock, and others; and holes and channels appear in the stone, which could only have been formed by the bursting out and running of the water. No art of man could have done it, if any motive could be supposed for the undertaking in such a place as this."

This miracle has not escaped the notice of the ancient Greek poets. Callimachus represents Rhea bringing forth water from a rock in the same way, after the birth of Jupiter. Πληξεν ορος σκηπτρω, το δε οί δεχα πουλυ διεστη. Εκ δ' εχεεν μεγα χευμα.

Hymn ad Jov., ver. 31. - With her scepter struck
The yawning cliff; from its disparted height
Adown the mount the gushing torrent ran.
Prior.

The rock mentioned above has been seen and described by Norden, p. 144, 8vo.; Dr. Shaw, p. 314, 4th., where there is an accurate drawing of it; Dr. Pocock, vol. i., p. 143, etc., where the reader may

find some fine plates of Mount Horeb and Sinai, and four different views of the wonderful rock of Meribah. It is a vast block of red granite, fifteen feet long, ten broad, and twelve high. See Dr. Shaw's account at the end of Exodus. My nephew, who visited this rock in 1823, confirms the account of the preceding travelers, and has brought a piece of this wonderful stone. The granite is fine, and the quartz mica, and feldspar equally mixed in it. This rock or block of granite is the only type of Christ now existing.

EXODUS 17:7 He called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because the children of Israel quarrelled, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?"

Verse 7

He called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah - מַסָּה Massah signifies temptation or trial; and מְרִיבָה Meribah, contention or litigation. From 1Cor 10:4, we learn that this rock was a type of Christ, and their drinking of it is represented as their being made partakers of the grace and mercy of God through Christ Jesus; and yet many who drank fell and perished in the wilderness in the very act of disobedience! Reader, be not high minded, but fear! On the smiting of the rock by the rod of Moses, Mr. Ainsworth has the following pious note: "This rock signified Christ, and is therefore called a spiritual Rock, 1Cor 10:4. He being smitten with Moses's rod, and bearing the curse of the law for our sins, and by the preaching of the Gospel crucified among his people, Gal 3:1, from him floweth the spiritual drink wherewith all believing hearts are refreshed." Joh 7:37, and Isa 53:1-3.

EXODUS 17:8 Then Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

Verse 8

Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel - The Amalekites seem to have attacked the Israelites in the same way and through the same motives that the wandering Arabs attack the caravans which annually pass through the same desert. It does not appear that the Israelites gave them any kind of provocation, they seem to have attacked them merely through the hopes of plunder. The Amalekites were the posterity of Amalek, one of the dukes of Eliphaz, the son of Esau, and consequently Israel's brother, Gen 36:15, Gen 36:16.

Fought with Israel - In the most treacherous and dastardly manner; for they came at the rear of the camp, smote the hindmost of the people, even all that were feeble behind, when they were faint and weary; see Deu 25:18. The baggage, no doubt, was the object of their avarice; but finding the women, children, aged and infirm persons, behind with the baggage, they smote them and took away their spoils.

EXODUS 17:9 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."

Verse 9

Moses said unto Joshua - This is the first place in which Joshua the son of Nun is mentioned: the illustrious part which he took in Jewish affairs, till the settlement of his countrymen in the promised land, is well known. He was captain-general of the Hebrews under Moses; and on this great man's death he became his successor in the government. Joshua was at first called Hoshea, Num 13:16, and afterwards called Joshua by Moses. Both in the Septuagint and Greek Testament he is called Jesus: the name signifies Savior; and he is allowed to have been a very expressive type of our blessed Lord. He fought with and conquered the enemies of his people, brought them into the promised land, and divided it to them by lot. The parallel between him and the Savior of the world is too evident to require pointing out.

Top of the hill - Probably some part of Horeb or Sinai, to which they were then near.

EXODUS 17:10 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.

Verse 10

Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up - It is likely that the Hur mentioned here is the same with that Hur mentioned 1Chr 2:19, who appears from the chronology in that chapter to have been the son of Caleb, the son of Ezron, the son of Pharez, the son of Judah. The rabbins and Josephus say he was the brother-in-law of Moses, having married his sister Miriam. He was a person in whom Moses put much confidence; for he left him conjoint governor of the people with Aaron, when he went to confer with God on the mount, Exo 24:14. His grandson Bezaleel was the chief director in the work of the tabernacle; see Exo 31:2-5.

EXODUS 17:11 When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed. When he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

Verse 11

When Moses held up his hand - We cannot understand this transaction in any literal way; for the lifting up or letting down the hands of Moses could not, humanly speaking, influence the battle. It is likely that he held up the rod of God in his hand, Exo 17:9, as an ensign to the people. We have already seen that in prayer the hands were generally lifted up and spread out, (See Clarke's note on Exo 9:29), and therefore it is likely that by this act prayer and supplication are intended. The Jerusalem Targum says, "When Moses held up his hands in prayer, the house of Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hands from prayer, the house of Amalek prevailed." We may therefore conclude, that by holding up the hands in this case these two things were intended:

1. That hereby a reference was made to God, as the source whence all help and protection must come, and that on him alone they must depend.
2. That prayer and supplication to God are essentially necessary to their prevalence over all their enemies.

It is indisputably true that, while the hands are stretched out, that is, while the soul exerts itself in prayer and supplication to God, we are sure to conquer our spiritual adversaries; but if our hands become heavy - if we restrain prayer before God, Amalek will prevail - every spiritual foe, every internal corruption, will gain ground. Several of the fathers consider Moses, with his stretched-out hands, as a figure of Christ on the cross, suffering for mankind, and getting a complete victory over sin and Satan.

EXODUS 17:12 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.

EXODUS 17:13 Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

Verse 13

Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people - Amalek might have been the name of the ruler of this people continued down from their ancestor, (see Clarke on Exo 17:8 (note)), as Pharaoh was the name of all succeeding kings in Egypt. If this were the case, then Amalek and his people mean the prince and the army that fought under him. But if Amalek stand here for the Amalekites, then his people must mean the confederates he had employed on this occasion.

EXODUS 17:14 The LORD 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."

Verse 14

Write this for a memorial in a book - This is the first mention of writing on record: what it signified, or how it was done, we cannot tell. But it is evident that either this passage is introduced here instead of Deu 25:17, by way of anticipation, or that by the words *כתב שפר* *kethob and sepher* was intended only a monumental declaration of the defeat of Amalek by Joshua, by some action or symbolical representation; for it is immediately subjoined, "And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi." See Dr. A. Bayley, and see the note on Exodus 30 (note). It is very likely that the first regular alphabetical writing in the world was that written by the finger of God himself on the two tables of stone. What is said here was probably by way of anticipation, or means some other method of registering events than by alphabetical characters, if we allow that God gave the first specimen of regular writing on the tables of stone, which did not take place till some time after this.

Rehearse it in the ears of Joshua - Thus showing that Joshua was to succeed Moses, and that this charge should be given to every succeeding governor.

I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek - This threatening was accomplished by Saul, 1Sam 15:3, etc.; four hundred and twelve years after. Judgment is God's strange work; but it must take place when the sins which incensed it are neither repented of nor forsaken. This people, by their continued transgressions, proved themselves totally unworthy of a political existence; and therefore

said God to Saul, Go, and utterly destroy the Sinners the Amalekites; 1Sam 15:18. So their continuance in sin was the cause of their final destruction.

EXODUS 17:15 Moses built an altar, and called its name the LORD our Banner.

Verse 15

Jehovah-nissi - Jehovah is my ensign or banner. The hands and rod of Moses were held up as soldiers are wont to hold up their standards in the time of battle; and as these standards bear the arms of the country, the soldiers are said to fight under that banner, i.e., under the direction and in the defense of that government. Thus the Israelites fought under the direction of God, and in the defense of his truth; and therefore the name of Jehovah became the armorial bearing of the whole congregation. By his direction they fought, and in his name and strength they conquered; each one feeling himself, not his own, but the Lord's soldier.

EXODUS 17:16 He said, "The LORD has sworn: 'The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.'"

Verse 16

The Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek, etc. - This is no translation of the words *מלחמה יה על כס יד כי יד על כס יה* *ki yad al kes yah milchamah*, which have been variously rendered by different translators and critics; the most rational version of which is the following: Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of God, therefore will I have war with Amalek from generation to generation. This gives a tolerably consistent sense, yet still there is considerable obscurity in the passage. Houbigant, a most judicious though bold critic, supposes that, as *יהוה נסי* *Jehovah-nissi*, Jehovah my ensign, was spoken of immediately before, *כס* *kes*, a throne, in this verse, is an error of some transcriber for *נס* *nes*, an ensign, which might be readily occasioned by the great similarity between the *כ* *caph* and the *נ* *nun*. He thinks farther that the two letters *יה* *yah*, which are supposed to be here a contraction of the word *יהוה* *Yehovah*, are separated, the *י* *yod* from the *נס* *nes*, which should be written *נשי* *nissi*, and the *ה* *he*, from *מלחמה* *milchamah*, which should be written *המלחמה* *hammilchamah*, and then the whole verse will run thus: For the hand shall be upon the ensigns of war unto the Lord, against Amalek for ever, i.e., God makes now a declaration of war against the Amalekites, which shall continue till their final destruction. The conjecture of Mr. Julius Bate, in his *Literal Translation of the Pentateuch*, deserves attention. He supposes that, as *כס* *cos* signifies a cup, and a cup is emblematically used for wrath, on one of the stones of the altar, mentioned in the preceding verse, a hand holding a cup was sculptured, this being a memorial, according to the custom of hieroglyphical writing, that the Lord would continue the cup of wrath, portending continual war, against Amalek for ever. I prefer Houbigant's exposition.

1. This first victory of Israel must have inspired them with a considerable measure of confidence in God, and in his servant Moses. Though God alone could give them the victory, yet it was necessary to show them that it was by the influence of Moses they got it. Moses could not deliver Amalek into their hands; yet if Moses did not continue to hold up his hands, i.e., to pray, Amalek must prevail. God, therefore, wrought this work in such a way as to instruct the people, promote his own glory,

and secure the true honor of his servant. The Divine Being always performs the greatest number possible of ends, by the fewest and simplest means. In every work of God there is as much of wisdom and economy, as there is of sovereign uncontrolled power.

2. It is not probable that the people whom Joshua chose out to lead against Amalek were unarmed; and we have already seen that it is not at all likely that they came armed out of Egypt. And as the whole circumstances of this case show that those who fought against the Amalekites were properly equipped for the fight, we may then safely presume that they got their arms from the Egyptians, whose bodies were thrown on the shore after having been overwhelmed in the Red Sea. Thus, what was a judgment in the one case, was a most gracious providence in the other. Judgment on God's foes is mercy to his friends.

3. Of the efficacy of prayer we have already had the most striking examples. He who has the spirit of prayer, has the highest interest in the court of heaven; and the only way to retain it, is to keep it in constant employment. Apostasy begins in the closet: no man ever backslid from the life and power of Christianity who continued constant and fervent, especially in private prayer. He who prays without ceasing is likely to rejoice evermore.