

Exodus 17 - “Blessings and Battles”

Tonight we look at the last and 7th camping spot of Israel’s journey from Egypt.

1. **Succoth** (12:37) – “Tents” – tent town. Israel is going to live a pilgrims (sojourners) life. This is not our home!
2. **Etham** (13:20) – “With them”. God led them along the wilderness, but He will be with them and strengthen them.
3. **By The Red Sea** (14:2) – They were boxed in. Mountains on either side of them, Egypt’s army behind them, and the sea in front of them. There was nowhere for them to go! But God brought them here to demonstrate His power for His glory alone (14:17-18).
4. **Marah** (15:23) – “Bitter”. We can go through bitter times to reveal to us what’s inside us. But when we take it to the cross, these things get turned around and become sweet.
5. **Elim** (15:27) – “Palms”. This was an oasis. After those difficult, bitter experiences, God leads us to times of refreshing so that we can be renewed and strengthened in Him.
6. **Wilderness of Sin** (16:1) – After those mountain top experiences, the reality of the world can knock us around. We need a fresh experience, a daily meeting with the Lord. The principles of the manna teach that.
7. **Rephidim** (17:1) – “Resting Place”. The Lord brought them here to quench their thirst. It’s only when we taste of that living water that we truly find rest for our souls (John 4:13-14).

17:1 - *Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink.*

The Lord once again moved Israel to give them another test, to teach them a lesson. This was all about growing Israel in trust and dependence on the Lord.

- Now though this would be a stretching time, notice it says this was all ***according to the commandment of the Lord***. They were in the will of the Lord, yet they went through difficulty. We can easily surmise that all our struggles are just a direct result of sin or something we’ve done in a foolish manner, but there are times God will bring us through times of stretching so that we can have the Lord build into us the necessary qualities and characteristics of a follower of Christ.
- Lessons that we wouldn’t learn without that refining circumstance.

17:2-3 - *Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, “Give us water, that we may drink.” So Moses said to them, “Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?”³ And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, “Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”*

Once again we see the people of Israel quickly resorting to their true colours. They had recently seen God provide in this exact situation, but they forgot His mercy. They failed to simply turn to Him and ask for help. Instead, they went right into grumble mode.

This is a shame because in contending with Moses they were actually contending with God. They were tempting the Lord, or more accurately testing God.

- We must realize that all of our dissatisfactions in life are really revealing a disappointment with God. When we complain, we're saying that we're not happy with how God has been working in this situation.
- Israel is needing to learn that in times of trial, they need to turn **to** the Lord and not turn **on** the Lord.
- God's mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). Israel should have remembered that and began to seek the Lord rather than complain.
- Besides, God led them there. If He led them there, then He will be responsible to provide what they need.
- **Psalm 95:7b–9**, "Today, if you will hear His voice:⁸ "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As in the day of trial in the wilderness,⁹ When your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work."
- **Psalm 78:41**, "Yes, again and again they tempted God, And limited the Holy One of Israel."

Look at how the people complained:

- a) They demanded God's provision (17:2) – ***Give us water, that we may drink***. They were insistent on things getting done their way and in their timing. Do we ever do that? Do we get a little irritated and demanding when things aren't lining up with our own wishes and comforts? God is in control, and we need to trust Him to meet our needs according to His will, not ours!
- b) They denied God's protection (17:3) - ***Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children***... They went right into the worst

case scenario without even giving God a chance. They assumed the worst, and in so doing were denying that God would be able to see them through.

- c) They doubted God's presence (17:7) – ***Is the Lord among us or not?*** Just because they didn't readily see water before them, they doubted that God was even with them. Do we every allow our circumstances to be the gauge of whether God is with us? Do we question God's faithfulness because things aren't unfolding the way we want them to? This is a real tragedy because we end up tempting the Lord and causing ourselves unnecessary worry. If Israel could just stop and recount the already incredible ways God has come through. It's as though they were struggling with spiritual amnesia; failing to see what God has already done in their lives. ¹
- Paul uses these examples to further strengthen the church to be living in a manner that pleases God: **1 Corinthians 10:9–11**, *"nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; ¹⁰ nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."*

17:4-6 - *So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!" ⁵ And the Lord said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in 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.*

Once again, Moses becomes the target of the contentious people. But we know in reality they're contending with God.

So God equips Moses with something that would give him confidence. Moses' true confidence must always rest in the Lord, but here God graciously tells Moses to take his staff, a tool that has already been a conduit for God's display of power.

This however would still require a pretty big measure of faith in God. I mean, striking a rock to get water out of? This is absurd! Yet Moses would have to act in faith and step out in complete trust of God to see Him work.

¹ Adapted from Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God's glory* (p. 449). Crossway Books.

As we look at Scripture we find out what this rock is representing. It's not guesswork, it's not theories, but we see that the Scripture explains it to us. The Scriptures are the greatest commentary on Scripture.

- **1 Corinthians 10:1–4**, *"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."*

Jesus came as the bread of life, and now we see Him fulfilling this picture from the wilderness. You may recall the encounter He had with the Samaritan woman at the well in **John 4:13–15**, *"Jesus answered and said to her, 'Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.'*" ¹⁵ The woman said to Him, *"Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."*

Jesus has come to quench that thirst that everyone experiences without a relationship with Him. But for people to have a right relationship with Him, what needed to happen? Notice how Moses got the water – he had to strike the rock.

- In the same way, Jesus was stricken for us **Isaiah 53:4–5**, *"Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed."*
- Because of our sin, Jesus bore the punishment that was due us. He was stricken and crucified, that the penalty for sin could be paid. Because of His death and resurrection, and our faith in Him, we now experience that living water that flows out to us on a daily basis. It's this living water that quenches the deepest longing within. Jesus said in **John 7:37–39**, *"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'*" ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

Many people have not experienced that satisfying drink because they have never come to that place of recognizing that Jesus has done the work for us. He bore all of our sin and shame so that we would not have to. And all we need to do is

believe, just as that Scripture says. Simple! Believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that by believing in Him we can have everlasting life. But to many put the burden on their own shoulders. They feel that heaven is theirs if they earn it. Friends, you cannot earn your salvation. You have to learn to turn to the One who has provided it for you, free of charge!

That's why there are so many people in the world today filling their lives with alcohol, or drugs, or explicit relationships – it's an attempt to quench the thirst, that deep longing within. It will only be quenched in Jesus. He is that Rock where the water flows from!

What a great picture we see in all this of what Jesus has done for us. Interestingly, the Israelites came upon a similar situation some years later. Numbers 20 gives us the account. In like manner, the people were thirsty and they complained, but this time God told Moses to speak to the rock, and water will flow out of it. But Moses in frustration of the people, and in anger, struck the rock twice. Now God graciously gave them water, but it came at a price. You see, Moses mis-represented God. It was serious enough that Moses was now unable to lead the people into the promised land. He would not enter into it. The type was spoiled. The rock was to be struck with his rod the first time. This pictured Jesus' crucifixion, the punishment He bore in our place. But that's it; Jesus doesn't need to go through that again. The sacrifice was once for all. And for us, all we need to do now is approach Jesus and speak to Him. People today, just need to ask for His forgiveness and salvation and that water will flow freely to you.

- It's a serious thing to mis-represent the Lord. Many people are looking at you to get their understanding of who God is. Are you doing a good job? Would God be pleased? I pray that we may ever grow to be more and more like Christ!

17:7 - *So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"*

Massah means *testing* or *temptation*.

Meribah means *strife* or *quarreling*.

With all that Israel has seen and been through, there really should be no room for testing or quarreling and certainly no room for complaining against God. They're even questioning if the Lord is with them.

Yet it's only been a short while that they've been miraculously delivered out of Egypt, seen the Red Sea parted for their escape, seen bitter waters made pure, given manna to feast on each day. Not to mention having God guide them by a pillar of cloud in the day and a pillar of fire at night. God has been overwhelmingly visible and gracious.

- These Israelites are learning some valuable lessons through all this, namely that God doesn't exist to pamper them, they exist to praise Him.
- Israel has thought that God owes them. Yet God's the One that has redeemed them and delivered them. If anything, Israel needs to see how their lives are to be surrendered to the Lord.

When we fall prey to thoughts that God owes us, then we quickly get unsettled when things are not going the way we want them to. We quickly turn to complaining and grumbling rather than contentment and gratitude.

God is good and He does all things well. Even in the midst of testing, God's purposes are for our blessing and His glory. How we need to learn to rest in Him!

- Interestingly the place they were at became known as Massah and Meribah. Yet the place they were taken to was originally Rephidim, which means *resting place*. God intended them to enjoy the blessing of resting in Him, trusting Him for what they needed. A grumbling spirit brings a lack of rest. Learn to trust the Lord. And learn to trust the Lord in the difficult dry places. These are opportunities for Him to work in us in a way that will strengthen and mature us in Him; so that these tests become less of an irritant and more of a blessing.

17:8-9 - *Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. ⁹ And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand."*

Soon after Israel receives this water, which pictures salvation and the Holy Spirit, look at what happens: the battle begins!

Amalek is a descendent of Esau and the Amalekites are throughout Scripture a type of the flesh.

- Again, the picture is quite perfect: when a life is given to Christ and the Holy Spirit is now dwelling in you, the flesh opposes it.
- The flesh was once ruling, it was at the top, but now through the Lord's transformation and regeneration, the flesh got shoved in the basement. But it keeps fighting to be back on top. We're never fully rid of it until we enter into the glory of the Lord and put off incorruption and mortality (1 Cor 15:53).

- I'm sure you all know first-hand what this struggle is like. Even Paul knew it well and wrote in **Romans 7:18–19**, *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice."*
- There's a battle going on!

The Amalekites are a type of our flesh that is in constant opposition to our new Spirit nature. So what are we to do?

God told Saul to go and utterly destroy the Amalekites and to not spare anything (1 Samuel 15:3). But we find later in that chapter that Saul spared king Agag, and kept some of their possessions that were good. **Romans 13:14** says, *"...make no provision for the flesh..."* Saul did that and it will be the thing that will later destroy him. In 2 Samuel 1 we find that it was an Amalekite that put the final sword in Saul that killed him.

- You see, if we do not crucify the flesh, it will wage war against us and can ultimately cause our demise. In fact, Haman, the one who ordered the complete extermination of the Jews in Esther, was a descendant of Agag.
- The point is this, we know that we're engaged in an ongoing battle because we have a very real enemy of our souls. And he works through the world and our flesh to try and drag us down. But we have one who is greater, one who helps us in our time of need.

17:10 - *So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.*

Look who goes out into battle – Joshua! This is the first time we see Joshua leap onto the pages of Scripture. And here he is submitting to Moses, and fighting Amalek.

Joshua means *Jehovah is salvation*, and it's the Hebrew equivalent of Jesus. Just as Joshua submitted to Moses, Jesus came and submitted to the will of the Father. He went out and provided a great victory for us defeating sin and Satan! We no longer need to succumb to the enemy's plots, we no longer need to walk in defeat. Paul would continue to say in **Romans 7:24–25**, *"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

But notice, it's not just relying on Joshua who goes out into battle, this victory was also brought about through prayer!

17:11-13 - *And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. ¹² But Moses' hands became heavy; so 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 the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. ¹³ So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.*

Moses holding up his hand was taking a posture of prayer.

- **1 Timothy 2:8**, *"I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;"*

As long as Moses was interceding, Israel was prevailing.

What we see here is that the secret to waging war against the flesh is not just to try and out muscle it on our own, but to pray!

We see the importance of prayer throughout Scripture:

- **Colossians 4:2**, *"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;"*
- **1 Thessalonians 5:17**, *"pray without ceasing,"*
- **Romans 12:12**, *"rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;"*

But we see that Moses got tired. Ever get tired when praying? Absolutely!

Moses needed those around him to help, and to lift up his hands. Prayer is of vital importance, but what this teaches us is that there is something dynamic about praying with others. The early church often gathered together for prayer.

- This too reflects the importance of the body that we talked about on Sunday. You may not feel like you have an important part in the body, but there's no unimportant parts! We're all needed.
- Without Aaron and Hur, Moses would not have been able to remain in a posture of prayer. And what took place in the mount of intercession impacted what happened in the valley of interaction.

"The church has many organizers, but few agonizers; many who pay, but few who pray; many resters, but few wrestlers; many who are enterprising, but few who are interceding. People who are not praying and praying. The secret of praying is praying in secret. A worldly Christian will stop praying and a praying Christian will stop worldliness. Tithes may build a church, but tears will give it life. That is the difference between the modern church and the early church. In the

matter of effective praying, never have so many left so much to so few. Brethren, let us pray” (Leonard Ravenhill). ²

We see that there is a great contributing combination to our fight against the flesh: ***So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.***

We see pictured here the Word and Prayer.

- **Ephesians 6:17–18**, *"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."*

We must put on the armour of God, and we must wage war against the flesh. But let's never forget that our reliance is always on Jesus who gives us the victory! Jesus is the greater Joshua, and the greater Moses. Jesus never needs to have hands held up, He never gets tired.

- **Hebrews 7:25**, *"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."*

17:14-16 - *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." ¹⁵ And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-Lord-Is-My-Banner; ¹⁶ for he said, "Because the Lord has sworn: the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.*

Notice Moses is not putting up a plaque in honor of Joshua, he's not celebrating Israel's tenacity. This is an altar in honor of the Lord. He's the One that brought the victory. He named it YHWH Nissi, or the Lord is my banner.

What's that mean? It means they fought under the standard or covering of the Lord. He's the one that they represented, and He represented them!

There's an obscure meaning in the Hebrew of verse 16. It literally reads, *"Because a hand is upon the throne of the Lord, the Lord has sworn..."*

² Michael P. Green. (2000). *1500 illustrations for biblical preaching* (pp. 277–278). Baker Books.

It could be in reference to Moses' hands lifted up in dependence of God. Or it could mean Amalek's hand that was against the Lord. And because of it, the Lord will have war with Amalek.

Either way, we see that Amalek will be a thorn in the side of Israel. In the same way, nothing good comes out of our flesh. Let's be sure to do battle with it, leaning on the victory the Lord has already provided for us.

- **Romans 6:10–12**, *"For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts."*

"But Moses also put an entry into the official book of records⁹ that Israel should contend with Amalek until that nation was completely destroyed. Israel fought them again at Kadesh-Barnea but was defeated (Num. 14:45); Gideon conquered them along with the Midianites (Jud. 6:33). King Saul failed to obey God and exterminate the Amalekites, so he lost his crown (1 Sam. 15) and was himself killed by an Amalekite (2 Sam. 1:1–16). David defeated the Amalekites who raided his camp (1 Sam. 30), and when he became king, finally subdued them (2 Sam. 8:11–12). During the reign of Hezekiah, his armies annihilated the few Amalekites who still remained. God's judgment of the Amalekites teaches us that you can't attack the throne of God and get away with it."³

⁹ See 24:4, 7; 34:27; Numbers 33:1–2; Deuteronomy 25:17–19; 31:9, 24.

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1998). *Be delivered* (pp. 93–94). Chariot Victor Pub.