

"The Rock of God"  
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Numbers 20:1-13

"And the people of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh. And Miriam died there and was buried there. Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! Why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink." Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them, and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle." And Moses took the staff from before the LORD, as he commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them." These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and through them he showed himself holy."

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I'm sure Moses and Aaron were caught completely off guard hearing the complaints of the people of Israel, he said facetiously. It was déjà vu all over again: "Would that we perished with our brothers...why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place... you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle." Like father, like son. John Piper once made this distinction: "God's people did not trust that God's providence is good, but accused Moses and God of harmful purposes...They aren't questioning God's timing. They are questioning his goodness. They aren't saying that God is incompetent to give them water. They're saying he doesn't intend to... We may not understand all the reasons why God chooses a waterless encampment for us. But story after story after story in the Bible, including this one, is God's roar from heaven: 'Trust me. Trust me.'" Psalm 63:1 reminds me: "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water." "What was my latest "waterless encampment" where the only option I had was to trust God and how did it turn out?

The parents of the surviving Israelites taught them well of how to respond to adversity...by grumbling and quarreling with Moses and Aaron. Parents are often shocked by what comes out

of the mouth of their little darling only to realize that their child learned it from them. And then there are the mannerisms that they pick up from their parents as well. How much thought, if any, have I given to the “words of wisdom” or “family traditions” that have I been passing on to my little ones...the next generation?  
How well do I respond to suffering and why?

When it comes to personal suffering, do I tend to exaggerate my circumstance making a mountain out of a molehill? If so, why so? If not, why not?

The people of Israel find themselves right back where they began their wilderness trek...Kadesh...just 40 years later. Back in Exodus 17:7, Moses memorialized the Israelite’s failure to believe in God’s saving presence by calling the place “Meribah” which literally means “contention; quarreling”. John Piper’s point was that: “Moses doesn’t name the place “Grace abounding,” or “Water from the Rock,” or “God is faithful.” He names it Massah and Meribah. Massah means “testing.” Meribah means “quarreling.” Then he makes the meaning explicit: “... because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord” (Exodus 17:7). If my current location was to be named after my current attitude towards God, what would the place be called and why?

After seeking God’s guidance, Moses is told to “[t]ake **the** staff, and assemble the congregation” (emphasis added). Which staff was “the” staff that Moses was to get, where was “the” staff at this time and why was it where it was? (Hint: see Numbers 17:10-11)

In spite of God’s command to “tell the rock”, Moses opted to repeat what he had done the last time he was at Meribah – he struck the rock (Exodus 17:6) and why not? After all, it worked for Moses the first time he had to provide water to the grumbling Israelites...right? Moses had a wash-rinse-and repeat kind of mindset towards God...it was good enough once; it should be good enough today. Has that kind of mindset crept into my spiritual life when it comes to my prayer life or my worship? If so, how so? If not, why not?

In spite of Moses’ faux pas (blunder), God still provided the people of Israel with water “abundantly.” What, if anything, does this tell me about God’s character and will for me and why?

God's beef with Moses was that Moses "did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy". C.H. Spurgeon speaking on Hebrews 12:14 ("Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.") said on September 22, 1904: "One feels most happy when blowing the trumpet of jubilee, proclaiming peace to broken hearts, freedom to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. But God's watchman has another trumpet, which he must sometimes blow; for thus saith the Lord unto him, "Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain." Times there are when we must ring the tocsin [an alarm bell]; men must be startled from their sleep, they must be roused up to enquire, "What are we? Where are we? Whither are we going?" Nor is it altogether amiss for the wisest virgins to look to the oil in their vessels, and for the soundest Christians to be sometimes constrained to examine the foundations of their hope, to trace back their evidences to the beginning, and make an impartial survey of their state before God... We are to follow holiness – this must be practical holiness; the opposite of impurity, as it is written, "God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness."... This holiness is a thing of growth. It may be in the soul as the grain of mustard-seed, and yet not developed; it may be in the heart as a wish and a desire, rather than anything that has been fully realized – a groaning, a panting, a longing, a striving. As the Spirit of God waters it, it will grow till the mustard-seed shall become a tree. Holiness, in a regenerate heart, is but an infant; it is not matured – perfect it is in all its parts, but not perfect in its development. Hence, when we find many imperfections and many failings in ourselves, we are not to conclude that, therefore, we have no interest in the grace of God. This would be altogether contrary to the meaning of the text... Heart-work, carried out afterwards into life-work – this is what the Lord wants." How careful am I to "uphold [God] as holy in the eyes" of others with whom I associate on a daily basis? Explain.

Do I need to be "roused up to enquire", to take "an impartial survey of [my] state before God" when it comes to how I uphold God's holiness to others? If so, why so? If not, why not?

The people of Israel (and Moses, by his actions) were called rebels, "One who willfully violates a law; One who disobeys the king's proclamation; A villain who disobeys his lord." How easy is it for me to consider my disobedience to God's directions as anything other than an act of rebellion?

Pastor Wally said, "Do not mistake earthly success with being pleasing to God; the fear of the Lord is what pleases God." Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 (ESV) reminds me that: "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God." How can I know if my success or the success of another is of God or not? Explain.