

Water from the Rock

Rephidim, the next camping place of the Israelites reported in Exodus after the Desert of Sin, was not far from Mount Sinai. The rock that Moses struck there to get water was “at Horeb.” Horeb was the mountain range where Moses had tended sheep for his father-in-law, Jethro. Mount Sinai was one of the peaks in this Horeb mountain range. After the experience of receiving manna and quail in the Desert of Sin, the Israelites camped at two other places before reaching Rephidim. These two places, Dophkah and Alush, were mentioned by Moses later when he gave a list of all the places where Israel camped, as we read in Numbers 33:12-13.

Nothing of special note seems to have happened at Dophkah and Alush, but we call attention to this in order to appreciate better the situation at Rephidim. Israel had been on the move again for several days. The hills were getting higher, the valleys were narrower and full of huge rocks, and springs of water were nowhere to be found.

This time the Israelites not only complained. They “quarreled” with Moses. They even threatened to stone him, (Exodus 17:2-4). How thankless of those who under his leadership had been so wondrously fed with manna and quail! But the Lord patiently deals with the Israelites as a father with little children in distress. He directs Moses to strike a certain rock in the presence of his elders. As Moses obeys, water comes out of the rock for the people to drink.

Who would have blamed Moses at this point if he had felt like taking his staff and going back to tend sheep for his father-in-law, who lived nearby! After putting forth his every effort to serve the people, they were ready to turn against him as soon as the first trouble arises. “*What should I do with this people?*” he asks the Lord in his dismay. Yet he accepts the Lord’s direction to strike a rock, trusting that the Lord will bring water out of that rock. No wonder that he called the place “Massah,” which means “testing,” and “Meribah,” which means “quarreling.” Through their quarreling the Israelites were testing the Lord, demanding proof that He was still among them. In His mercy the Lord again gave evidence of His love to these undeserving people.

The apostle Paul uses this incident as a metaphor for God’s mercy through Christ, the Rock of our salvation. Writing to the Church at Corinth Paul says, “*I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ,*” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

The Saviour-God showered His grace on His people Israel by means of this rock in the desert, just as God has blessed us in Christ beyond all that we sinful creatures deserve. “*Nevertheless,*” Paul continues, “*God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are*

standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it," (verses 5, 11-13).

What a fitting application of this Old Testament event! Paul says it all! We all need to turn again and again to that Saviour who declared in our Gospel reading for today, John chapter 4, *"whoever drinks the water that I shall give him will never become thirsty. However, the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life,"* (verse 14). Yet how often are we not tempted to complain about God's ways of dealing with us, forgetting that eternal purpose He has planned for us in Christ.

"Sir," we need to say to our Lord, as the Samaritan woman did, *"give me this water, so that I may not get thirsty."*