

The Rock and the Warfare

Exodus 17:1-16

In Exodus chapter 17, we find the children of Israel in a place of transition. They are moving through the wilderness, following the cloud and the pillar of fire, learning what it means to walk with God.

The Thirst of the People

The chapter opens with the congregation journeying from the Wilderness of Sin and pitching camp at a place called Rephidim. Now, the name Rephidim means "a place of rest," but for the Israelites, it was anything but restful because there was no water for the people to drink.

Immediately, we see the old nature rise up. Instead of looking back at how God had just provided the manna from heaven, the people began to contend with Moses. They demanded, *"Give us water, that we may drink."* Moses, displaying the heart of a leader under pressure, asks them a penetrating question: *"Why do you tempt the Lord?"*

You see, when we complain about our circumstances, our quarrel isn't really with our leaders or our bosses or our spouses—it's with the Lord. The New Testament warns us not to follow this example of "tempting God" through a spirit of murmuring.

The people were so caught up in their physical thirst that they accused Moses of bringing them out of Egypt just to kill them, their children, and their livestock. Moses does the only thing a believer can do when the pressure is on: He cried out to the Lord.

The Smitten Rock

God's response to Moses is beautiful. He tells him to take the elders, take the rod—the same rod used to strike the Nile—and go to the rock in Horeb. God says, *"Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock."* Moses was commanded to strike the rock, and water would come gushing out.

Now, we know from the New Testament, specifically in First Corinthians chapter 10, verse 4, that "that Rock was Christ." This is a powerful "type" or picture of Jesus.

- **The Rock Smitten:** Just as the rock had to be struck for the life-giving water to flow, Jesus Christ had to be smitten for us.
- **The Finished Work:** On the cross, Jesus shed His precious blood to pay the price for our sins. He was "stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted" (Isaiah 53:4). From His finished work, the living water of salvation flows to everyone who is thirsty.
- **The Resurrection:** The fact that the water flowed—and the fact that Jesus rose from the dead—declares to the whole world that He is indeed God, Savior, and Lord.

Later in the journey, in Numbers chapter 20, the people are thirsty again. God tells Moses to *speak* to the rock. But in his anger, Moses strikes it twice. This was a serious error because it broke the

spiritual picture. Christ only needed to be smitten once and for all. He doesn't need to be crucified again. Now, if you are thirsty, you don't need to "strike" or work; you simply need to speak to the Rock in prayer and receive the living water.

As Jesus said in John chapter 7, verse 37: *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink."*

The Conflict with Amalek

No sooner do they have water than a new problem arises: Amalek comes to fight. In the Bible, Amalek is a consistent "type" of the flesh. He was a descendant of Esau, the man who sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. Just as the Israelites were enjoying the water from the rock, the enemy attacked. Isn't that just like the Christian life? You have a great spiritual breakthrough, and suddenly the "flesh" rises up to war against you.

Moses goes to the top of the hill with the rod of God, while Joshua leads the men in battle. Notice the dynamic:

- When Moses held up his hands (a posture of prayer and dependence on God), Israel prevailed.
- When his hands grew heavy and dropped, Amalek prevailed.

Aaron and Hur had to come alongside Moses, place a stone under him, and hold up his hands until the sun went down. This teaches us two things: First, we cannot win the battle against our flesh in our own strength; it requires constant dependence on the Lord. Second, we need each other. We need brothers and sisters to "hold up our hands" when we get weary.

The Edict Against the Flesh

The Lord tells Moses to write this down: *"I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."* God has no "reformation program" for your flesh. He doesn't want to "improve" your old nature; He wants to put it to death.

Years later, King Saul was commanded to utterly destroy the Amalekites. He disobeyed and kept the "best" of the sheep and the king alive. Because he tried to compromise with the flesh, he lost his kingdom. We see the consequences even later in the book of Esther, where Haman—an Agagite, a descendant of the Amalekite kings—tried to wipe out all the Jews. If you don't deal with the flesh, the flesh will eventually try to deal with you.

Practical Application & Challenge

For the Believer: Are you trying to "fix" your old nature today? Are you trying to make a deal with a certain sin? The Word of God tells us to "mortify" or put to death the deeds of the body. You can't win this battle by willpower. You win it by looking to the hill—looking to Jesus—and relying on His strength. My challenge to you this week is to stop struggling in your own power and start "speaking to the Rock." Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to walk in the Spirit so you won't fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

For the Seeker: Perhaps you are here today and you feel like you're in a "wilderness." You're thirsty for something the world can't provide. You've tried the "broken cisterns" of money, relationships, or success, and you're still dry.

The Rock has already been smitten for you. Jesus Christ went to that cross, shed His blood for your sins, and rose again to give you eternal life. He is the Lord of Glory, and He is inviting you today. You don't have to earn it. You don't have to clean yourself up first. He says, "Come."

Will you give your life to Jesus today? Simply acknowledge that you are thirsty, believe that He died and rose for you, and ask Him to be your Savior. He will give you a "well of water springing up into everlasting life."