

Wilderness Wandering With God

Part 5: Where Is God?

Exodus 17:1-7

SERIES INTRODUCTION

Some 3,200 years ago across the seas, God was leading His people on a journey of a life-time. With a mighty hand, God had won the release of the Jewish people from slavery and was guiding them to a land of promise. Along the way, God was teaching His people about the kind of relationship He wanted to have with them. Life Lessons, if you will.

Today, while much has changed, much remains the same. God is still taking His redeemed people through a journey in their own lives, in an effort to teach us our own Life Lessons on how we are to live in relationship with Him.

Like the Hebrews of old, we too have our own Wilderness Wandering With God.

Our text for today's message is found in Exodus chapter 17.

INTRODUCTION

Without water we try to solve our needs our way — This is humanism.

We turn to things — This is materialism.

We try to please ourselves — This is hedonism.

What we need is faith - This is called trust.

The Hebrews on their journey across the wilderness have once again hit a pot-hole on their way to the Promised Land. In last week's message, they had run out of bread. When we turn the page from Exodus chapter 16 to chapter 17, we see that they have arrived at a place that has no source of fresh water. And their response after all that they have experienced is to ask, "Is the LORD among us, or not?" (Exodus 17:7b)

It does seem to be a universal response to human need and suffering that we ask a very similar question, "Where Is God?"

Now, that question gets asked with an attitude. It's not a question borne out of a sincere, hurting heart, pleading with God for His divine intervention. Oh no! Even for many believers, the attitude is often one of contempt. In other words, "how could God allow me to suffer this way?!" Or, "why hasn't God stopped this from happening to me?"

Let's read the narrative in it's entirety. Please follow along as I read Exodus 17:1-7.

#1 - Understanding God's Perspective, Exodus 17:1

Let's go back, now that we've read the entire scenario and make sure we understand how this situation began.

The wording of verse 1 makes clear, that the Israelites did not camp at Rephidim of their own volition but of God's, and therefore one is forced to conclude that once again God had led them directly to a place where there was no drinkable water (cf. 15:22–26).

Thus the event represents yet another test of Israel's faithfulness, a test that is again not easily passed and one with the added aspect of Israel's making the mistake of putting God to the test.

#2 - A Complaining Spirit, Exodus 17:2-4

In saying to the people, "Why do you put the LORD to the test," Moses showed that he knew that the protest represented an attempt to manipulate God.

The people should have known by then that God would provide their needs. He had done so consistently throughout the plagues and their aftermath and most recently in providing both food and water supernaturally for them.

The day of this current protest, after all, was one more day on which the people had been able to gather manna to feed themselves and their animals.

What they were doing was refusing to wait for God to take care of them. Instead, soon after finding no drinkable water and having learned that their prior protests got results, they were launching a protest parallel to those of the past, thus testing God. ***"Testing God" is demanding or expecting him to do something special for you, something you haven't earned and don't per se deserve.***

Testing God always involves some degree of doubt about whether or not one's present circumstances are all that one deserves and whether or not God could or should have done a better job of providing one's needs.

Moses did what he frequently had to do as a leader: he called on the Lord for help (15:25; 32:30ff; Num. 11:1–2; 12:13; 14:13ff). "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1).

#3 - God's Provision, Exodus 17:5-6

God was patient with His disobedient and grumbling people. He told Moses to take ... the staff with which he had struck the Nile River (7:20) and to strike a rock at Horeb (17:6). This "staff of God" was a symbol of power; holding it was a sign of dependence

and trust in God.

In Moses' striking the rock, the Lord was pleased to satisfy His thirsty people with an abundant supply of water. So the Lord provided for them through yet another miracle.

#4 - Where Is God?, Exodus 17:7

A legacy of failure. Moses, in naming this place both, Massah and Meribah, is forever etching into the Jewish history their failure in trusting God.

“Massah” means, “testing;” and “Meribah” means, “quarreling.”

What a horrible epitaph! The Jewish people, in their grumbling over the circumstances God brought them into, failed because they tested God. They developed an attitude to God.