

## Lesson 9 – 27 March 2011

### Israel's Crises at Rephidim

**Lesson Scope:** [Exodus Chapters 17 and 18](#)

#### Lesson Focus

Crises were not new in Israel's experience. It was a widespread famine that had first taken Jacob and his family to Egypt. There they had maintained their separate identity and multiplied despite Pharaoh's cruel oppression. With a mighty hand the Lord had delivered them from their bondage. After the tenth plague Pharaoh and his people were urgent in sending the Israelites out of the land (Exodus 12:33). They left, only to be pursued by Pharaoh and his army. Again, God showed His mighty power in delivering them at the Red Sea.

Israel's march through the wilderness was punctuated by one difficulty after another, hunger, thirst, weariness, and enemies. How often they had become discouraged by the way! God was testing their faith and preparing them for the Promised Land.

God moves in love for the well-being of His people. Although their circumstances are at times undesirable, God calls His people to more forward ill faith.

In the midst of tests and trials, our tendency, as was Israel's, is to question God's awareness of our need, to doubt His love for us, and to minimize His power to help. Yielding to such thoughts, in effect, places God on trial.

God's purpose in allowing trying circumstances stands in stark contrast to our faulty thinking. He allows us to experience extremity so that we grow in absolute dependence on Him, a dependence that continues even when the present crisis passes. He allows difficulties for the purpose of building our spiritual strength to meet greater tests in the future.

**Lesson Aim:** To see how each of God's children must do his part in advancing God's cause.

**Theme Verse:** [1 Corinthians 15:58](#). “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

## Lesson Text

### "Thou Shalt Smite the Rock"

#### Exodus 17:1-6

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and *there was* no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup>Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? <sup>3</sup>And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore *is* this *that* thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? <sup>4</sup>And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. <sup>5</sup>And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. <sup>6</sup>Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

### "Aaron and Hur Stayed Up His Hands"

#### Exodus 17:8-13

Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. <sup>9</sup>And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. <sup>10</sup>So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup>And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. <sup>12</sup>But Moses' hands *were* heavy; and they took a stone, and put *it* under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. <sup>13</sup>And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

### "Provide ... Able Men"

#### Exodus 18:5

And Jethro, Moses' father in law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God:

#### Exodus 18:8-9

And Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, *and* all the travail that had come

upon them by the way, and *how* the LORD delivered them. <sup>9</sup>And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians.

### Exodus 18:13

And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening.

### Exodus 18:17-22

And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest *is* not good. <sup>18</sup>Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that *is* with thee: for this thing *is* too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. <sup>19</sup>Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: <sup>20</sup>And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. <sup>21</sup>Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them, *to be* rulers of thousands, *and* rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: <sup>22</sup>And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, *that* every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear *the burden* with thee.

## Questions for Study

### "Thou Shalt Smite the Rock"

1. What objectives did the Lord achieve through His method of giving Israel water?
2. What are some common motivations for murmuring against authority?
3. Suggest some positive responses to the challenges we face individually and as congregations.

### "Aaron and Hur Stayed Up His Hands"

4. How did Moses, Aaron, Hur, and Joshua each contribute to the victory over Amalek?
5. How should we respond to weariness in Christian service?

### "Provide ... Able Men"

6. In what ways did both Moses and the congregation benefit from Jethro's advice?
7. What are some keys for being effective in the work God calls us to do?

## **Analyzing the Passage**

The children of Israel journeyed -according to the commandment of the Lord (Exodus 17:1). It was He who was ordering their itinerary and experiences for their good. A divine solution awaited them in every difficulty. God employed a variety of methods in meeting Israel's needs—smiting the rock for water, holding up Moses' hands for victory, and receiving Jethro's advice. Jethro himself cautioned that his suggested plan would be effective only if "God command thee so" (Exodus 18:23).

The incident of striking the rock (Exodus 17:6) is a type of God's selecting His Son to be smitten to provide living water of salvation for all people.

Amalek (Exodus 17:8), descended from Esau, typifies the aggressive, evil qualities inherent in man's fallen nature (the flesh).

## **Principles and Applications**

### **"Thou Shalt Smite the Rock"**

1. In the midst of crisis, the child of God knows the source of true help (Exodus 17:4). The stress of a difficult situation brings temptations to employ ungodly methods. Perhaps a collection agency could recover money that someone owes us. Perhaps threat of force could deter would-be thieves or trespassers. Such thoughts seem reasonable, but they are not thoughts of faith. God has far better solutions for our needs.

2. The child of faith God has a responsibility to set an example of (Exodus 17:5). When the checking account is dry and the cupboard is empty, striving with our spouse will not help matters. Neither will it help to wring our hands in despair when our children are disobedient. God has provided Biblical solutions for our needs. We must trust God to meet our needs and commit ourselves to wait for His answers.

3. The faithful child of God is responsible to strengthen and confirm his faltering brethren (Exodus 17:5). We do not leave our brethren to despair over the difficulties they face. Sometimes the one thing a faltering brother needs is the reassurance that God really is working for his good. You have the opportunity to communicate that truth.

### **"Aaron and Hur Stayed Up His Hands"**

4. Fervent prayer is essential for victory (Exodus 17:10-11). Jesus said, "Without me ye can do nothing." Without prayer, that is exactly what we will accomplish. Prayer changes every situation by inviting God into it. Prayer moves God. Just as a person cannot answer a phone call without be-

coming involved in a small way with the caller, God always gets involved in the prayers of His saints.

5. The child of God recognises the importance of working together (Exodus 17:12-13). God's plans are always bigger than our comprehension even the collective body of believers cannot fully understand the operation of its Head. Christ utilizes every member of His body. How important it is to fill the small role that He has chosen for me!

### **"Provide ... Able Men"**

6. The child of God has a ready testimony of what God has done (Exodus 18:5, 8-9). We go through life believing that God is working through us, beside us, and around us. If this is what we really believe is happening, why not let it be known? Otherwise, those around us may look at the blessings we are enjoying and attribute them to our good management or work ethic or plain way of life, or simply to luck. God deserves the glory.

7. The servant of God serves His people (Exodus 18:13). Church leaders carry special responsibilities, but God calls all of us to serve others. If we are alert to the needs around us, and if we are eager to help, we will not lack opportunities. We can help the weary with material duties; we can comfort those in emotional distress; we can lighten the cares of the aging. Jesus left us the perfect example of living for the good of others.

8. The servant of God must work within his human limitations (Exodus 18:17-18). All of us have limits, but we often do not know where those boundaries are. The perspective of someone else may be just what we need from our companion, from our church brethren, or even from our children. To go beyond what God intended for us to do is to invite frustration and failure.

9. The child of God advances God's cause by receiving good counsel (Exodus 18:19-21). "We are labourers together with God." Therefore, we should listen carefully to the concerns and views of our brethren, submitting one to one another in love. Should our congregation add on to the church building or begin a new congregation? Should our family accept the invitation to serve on the foreign mission field? Should I reduce my material involvements to give more time for writing and evangelism? The best answers to these questions are found by communicating together as brethren.

10. God's work calls for a broad involvement of varied abilities (Exodus 18:21-22). The apostles recognized this when they ordained the seven dea-

cons. A call to serve on a committee or on the school board helps one to focus on "strengthening the stakes" of what is already in place. Those who do not have such responsibilities should see themselves as "lengthening the cords- in their greater availability to develop personal relationships and witness opportunities with their neighbors.

11. Faithfully filling our role enables others to fill theirs (Exodus 18:23). Like our physical body, the church functions interdependently on a spiritual level. A failure of one member in the body means that someone else must fill the gap, perhaps neglecting his own work. Our personal role may seem insignificant, but others are depending on us to do our part. As we work, the Holy Spirit will direct us.

### **Important Teachings**

1. In the midst of crisis, the child of God knows the source of true help (Exodus 17:4).

2. The child of God has a responsibility to set an example of faith (Exodus 17:5).

3. The faithful child of God is responsible to strengthen and confirm his faltering brethren (17:5).

4. Fervent prayer is essential for victory (Exodus 17:10-11).

5. The child of God recognizes the importance of working together (Exodus 17:12-13).

6. The child of God has a ready testimony of what God has done (Exodus 18:5, 8-9).

7. The servant of God serves His people (Exodus 18:13).

8. The servant of God must work within his human limitations (Exodus 18:17-18).

9. The child of God advances God's cause by receiving good counsel (Exodus 18:19-21).

10. God's work calls for a broad involvement of varied abilities (Exodus 18:21-22).

11. Faithfully filling our role enables others to fill theirs (Exodus 18:23).

## Answers to Questions

1. What objectives did the Lord achieve through His method of giving Israel water?

God's plan solved the immediate need for water. It also confirmed divine approval of Moses' leadership by giving him a part in providing for the water. The use of Moses' rod reminded the people of God's faithfulness at the Red Sea. God's plan answered Moses' prayer in verse 4.

2. What are some common motivations for murmuring against authority?

Pride and envy are common but powerful motivations. In difficulty, people tend to blame others; leaders are often the most visible and handy targets. Incompetent leadership may tempt people to murmur.

3. Suggest some positive responses to the challenges we face individually and as congregations.

We must be cautious in how we think or speak about our situation, because Satan desires to use our difficulty to his advantage. Faith rests in the confidence that God has a solution to our need that would be for our good and for His glory. We should communicate openly with our spiritual brethren. We should pray, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

4. How did Moses, Aaron, Hur, and Joshua each contribute to the victory over Amalek?

Moses ordered Joshua to lead the battle, and Moses took a place of observation, holding up the rod of God. Aaron and Hur helped Moses hold up the rod. Joshua selected choice men for battle and engaged the enemy in the valley.

5. How should we respond to weariness in Christian service?

When our own hands are heavy, we should pray for endurance. We can also "come ... apart . . . and rest a while." When others' hands are heavy, we can aid them. The opportunities are endless, and the needs are real.

6. In what ways did both Moses and the congregation benefit from Jethro's advice?

Moses received a benefit in that the work of governing the people was accomplished efficiently and capably without undue stress on him. The people benefited by receiving prompt answers to their questions and problems.

7. What are some keys for being effective in the work God calls us to do?

The work is God's, and we are only servants. "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). Our work can

be successful only as it is done in harmony with Biblical principles and by divine power. We need frequent times of prayer, seeking the Lord's direction and strength.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

Israel faced three major tests in this lesson. In each situation, the solution was a mixture of divine assistance and human administration. The challenge for us is to determine with a greater resolve to work together as a body, to walk humbly, to foster evangelical zeal, and to believe that, with God, all that He asks of us is possible.

### **Research Guide**

1. Read 1 Corinthians 10 for an explanation of the rock in the wilderness. Consider also Israel's many other failures and the great deliverances God wrought for them.
2. Read the accounts of Jesus' wilderness temptations to better understand what it means to tempt God.