

Exegetical Notes, Exodus 17:1-7

“Not Again!”

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Exodus 17:1-7

Verse 1

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as YHWH commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

- The journey continues to the Promised Land. The people move from place to place as God directs.
- They come to a place called Rephidim and there discover that their water supply is, once again (see 15: 22-27), exhausted. That this is not the first time that Israel has experienced this problem is an important development in the story. In the previous case, God miraculously supplied their need. He showed himself to be YHWH Jireh, the God who provides.

Verse 2

So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put YHWH to the test?”

- The word “quarrel” implies that the reaction of the people is antagonistic toward Moses. At Marah, they “grumble and complain.” Their concern at Marah is their unhappiness with the circumstances they face for which they hold Moses accountable. Here, they face the same problem, but they are angry with Moses. There is an intensity here that was previously lacking. They are so angry with Moses that they are ready to kill him. See verse 4.
- Moses asks them why they test God. The test first comes from God for the people. See Exodus 16:4. He gave them specific instructions regarding the manna to test their willingness to follow him. By deciding not to trust God Israel turns the test back on God, but fails to

pass the test God set up for her. Israel is to trust YHWH Jireh to provide and to demonstrate that trust in obedience to him. By not trusting him to provide as he promised he would, Israel has failed God's test.

Verse 3

But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

- Grumbling and complaining has always worked. See Exodus 14:10-12, 15:24, and 16:2. It has become a pattern of life for them. It is what Israel does when they face an obstacle.

Verse 4

Then Moses cried out to YHWH, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me?"

- Moses turns to God for help. This has become his pattern when he is confronted with an obstacle.

Verse 5-6

YHWH answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.

- God responds to Moses' prayer by giving him specific instructions. He is to follow these directions specifically. If he does, the people will be blessed with water.
- Moses does follow the instructions given and water is given. Again God proves himself to be YHWH Jireh. He provides for Israel's need in answer to Moses' prayer.

Verse 7

And he (Moses) called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested YHWH saying, "Is YHWH among us or not?"

- In Hebrew "massah" means testing and "meribah" means rebellion.

- In Numbers 20, there is mention of another Meribah where very similar things happened. However, at this second Meribah Moses is not faithful to God's instructions.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Not Again!* They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)