

## Moses and the Desert Smack Down

Exodus 7:1-7

Sunday, October 25, 2020

Several weeks ago I sent an email to a few First B people. I let them know that I was going to do a sermon on **Exodus 17:1-7**, and asked them to read the verses ahead of time. I asked them to respond to two questions:

1. **What is something that sticks out to you from these verses?**
2. **What is one way people ought to apply the passage itself to real life?**

I received 9 responses. Those responses are what make up the majority of the sermon today.

What did they find? Let's read the verses that got the most of their attention and see. (Any time you see boldface text on the screen that is not Scripture, I'm quoting our contributors.)

*[The whole Israelite community] camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.*

<sup>2</sup> *So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."*

*Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test?"*

<sup>3</sup> *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?"*

<sup>4</sup> *Then Moses cried out to the Lord, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." (Exodus 7:1-4)*

Everyone has had it! There's no water to drink and the people are DONE! They take out their frustration on Moses. Moses takes out his frustration on them. Everyone is at peak stress. Moses pleads to God, "What am I to do with these people?"

**"Moses is tired as many leaders are tired and do not know how to meet the ever-demanding needs of the people. They are out of resources - the well is dry."** The well is dry because there is no water. The emotional well is dry because Moses feels he has absolutely nothing to contribute to the Israelite people.

Our contributors looked at the response and demands of the Israelite people with two distinct perspectives. Those perspectives centred on the question:

**Are the Israelites unreasonable?**

**OR**

**Does their response make sense?**

Was their gripe with Moses (and therefore with God) legitimate? Or were they unfair in their treatment of Moses and God.

**Are they being unreasonable?** Here were some thoughts about them reacting poorly.

***“The people demanded water right away. They did not trust that God would meet their need of water despite His faithfulness to them. Of course, God would provide them with water, but why did they not believe that?”***

***“The Israelites question if God is present with them and actually seem to deny he was when they accuse Moses of being the one that led them out of Egypt to kill them. They're so ungrateful and then don't trust God to provide them water. They doubted God was with them.”***

***It seemed the Israelites so quickly complained to Moses, blaming him for bringing them to this place in the desert where they very well may die from thirst. . . .***

***. . . It seemed they displayed no sense of trust in God who just previously filled their need for food with quail for them to eat in the evening and manna in the morning. . .***

***. . . Had they forgotten so soon of their faithful God....who also brought about their exodus from Egypt, & saved them from the Egyptians as they passed on dry land through the Red Sea? Instead of crying out to Him....was it just easy to blame their leader Moses?***

Time and time again God had provided for the Israelite people on this journey. When God liberates the Israelites from Egypt, he does so in spectacular fashion and humiliates Egypt in the process. When the Egyptian army tries to recapture the Israelites, the Lord provides a way of escape through the Red Sea, and uses that same sea to crush the Egyptian army. The people are hungry, so God provides this other-worldly food called manna. The people are bored of manna, so God provides quail. Every time there is a need, God has provided. But God has not just provided – God provides in spectacular fashion.

So from that perspective, it seems that the Israelites are indeed being unreasonable. They are unreasonable with Moses. They lack faith in God. They don't trust that God will provide, nor do they trust that God is with them.

But another perspective came from our First B contributors.

**Does their response make sense?**

***“The thing that always seems to stand out to me is that water is a pretty reasonable thing to ask for. We get dehydrated really quickly and it is pretty essential to life.”***

***“Water is also the source of all life on the planet. It is life currency which if not in circulation becomes trapped in polar ice, covered in space dust and stored like on Mars. The abundant oceans dry up and the atmosphere disappears. Life as we know it ceases to exist.”***

***“In the desert water is a valuable commodity. Something over which wars can be fought.”***

***“The need for water is legitimate - you don’t last long in a desert without it. It is a basic human need and if God is going to provide for them in any way, it should be water - and so the absence of water feels like the absence of God.”***

The Israelite people are missing the most basic of needs: water. We really don’t know what that is like. I sure don’t! When I get thirsty in the church office, I walk to the kitchenette in the fireside room and pour myself a glass of clean water from the sink. If I am thirsty, I turn on the tap and clean, reliable water is there. I have never in my life been far away from a reliable water source. I cannot put myself in the sandals of the Israelites.

So were the Israelites being unreasonable in their response to water scarcity?

Or were they being completely reasonable?

I don’t think it really matters. Their reality was their reality. “It is what it is.”

We have all observed the grief or pain of other people and had opinions about their handling of fear and loss. We don’t need to have those opinions, but we certainly seem to.

But whether the pain or stress of another person is “legitimate” or not, it’s certainly real to them. Our assessment of the situation does not help them to get through what they are going through.

Life is stressful. When we are in that stress it doesn’t matter how we got there. It doesn’t matter whether we do or don’t deserve our circumstances. To them, to us, to the Israelites difficult circumstances seem all too real when we are in them.

In this place of stress, **the People Turn to Moses.**

***“The people do not seem to have a direct relationship with God and they don’t know how to direct their need/request/complaint to God personally. They seem to only know God through Moses and they expect Moses to be the link and so complain to him.”***

***“Israelites looked to Moses to sustain them not God.”*** These ideas were noted by a few people. Moses was under a lot of pressure because he was under God-like expectations. Expectations he could not possibly bear! One of our contributors noted: ***“Ask yourself what worries, needs, and desires are you casting on other people when you should be casting them on God.”*** The Israelites seem to cast their concerns on Moses, not on God.

But Moses has that relationship with God, and **Moses turns to God.**

***“Moses . . . knowing God is faithful, turned to Him in his desperation, believing his life was in danger. The people were rising up against him in their anger.***

***God instructed Moses what to do, he listened & obeyed.”***

***“[God] checks the heartbeat of this leader, because the task may be light or heavy weight. And would need a leader who is focused despite distractions from followers.*** In his frustration, in his humility, in

his reliance on God, Moses blurts, “What am I to do with these people!?” God gives Moses instructions, and within those instructions God gives Moses and the people a reminder of God’s faithfulness.

**God has been faithful before. Remember!**

Moses will be using his staff, which is a reminder that he carries with him all the time of God’s faithfulness and presence. ***The same staff that smote the Nile River and ruined the water quality is now used to produce good water from a stone.***

***The abundant water of Egypt became useless with no complaints of thirst but the sparse water of the desert was sweet and life giving. Prior to it being given, there were lots of complaints of thirst.***

God is using a “call back” to remind the people of his enduring provision and presence. God is using Moses’ staff as a reminder. If we look to our own lives, we can probably find similar reminders. Times where God intervened, or times where God provided.

***God's revealed himself to us, so we can remember those times He's made His presence known and trust His presence to be among us/give Him the credit for his work instead of ourselves or other people. . . .***

***. . . This is especially helpful in hard times because we can remember we are not alone.***

When we carry with us those reminders of God’s presence and help, it helps us to handle the current crisis far better.

***It is so important to say "God, what is it you want me to learn? Help me to do that." . . . Am I willing to do that in spite of everything feeling so bleak and "I really am thirsty, this is a desert" or "I am going crazy with this lockdown, social distancing, masks." . . .***

***. . . Am I willing to say with joy in my heart "Lord teach me to pray" and doing that as I have the time?***

***Oh, how important it is for us to recognize and recall those memorial markers of God’s faithfulness throughout our life. . .***

***. . . Then, as we experience difficult times during life’s journey, those markers of God’s faithful presence with us, can give us confidence to seek him, to pray and trust him...our God who never changes.***

***“[God] has provided for me. I think that we all can learn to trust Him fully with our needs.”***

I want us to note that NONE of these responses come from a place of shallow faith or easy living. ALL of these responses come from people that have been fully immersed into dark and painful moments. All of these people have seen dark times and come through the other side with hope intact. Or they are people who are in dark times, but hold onto God through the darkness.

God’s past faithfulness is a reminder that **God is merciful now.**

**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. (Exodus 17:6)**

God is merciful now. Even more important, God is present now. God is present at the rock and God is present among the people and the elders.

We KNOW that God provides. Or at least we tell ourselves that God provides. And then we start to doubt. And then we end up in a crisis of life and faith. The reality is we see ourselves in their Israelites! We see ourselves in the waiting. We see ourselves pleading, “Is God faithful or not?”

Current reality matters. We do not really deal with life at all unless we deal with the harsh realities before us. But what matters more than our current crisis is that Christ is faithful and Christ is with us now.

It doesn't matter if you have “earned” your current situation or not – Christ is faithful, merciful and Christ is present with us.

It doesn't matter if you deal with your crisis in a noble manner - Christ is faithful, Christ is merciful, and Christ is present with us.

It doesn't matter if you are a hot mess when in crisis – Christ is faithful, Christ is merciful, and present with us.

It doesn't matter if your situation is fair or unfair – Christ is faithful, Christ is merciful, and present with us.

Lord, help us remember your faithfulness. Lord, help us trust in you. Thank you for your presence with us. Amen.