

THE TEST OF REPHIDIM

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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. 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? 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? And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. 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. 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. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us, or not?"

By the command of God, the children of Israel were brought to Rephidim, a place destitute of water. He who was enshrouded in the pillar of cloud was leading them, and it was by His express command that they were encamped at this place. God knew of the lack of water at Rephidim, and he brought his people hither to test their faith; but how poorly they proved themselves to be a people whom he could trust! Again and again he had manifested himself to them. He had slain the first-born of all the families in Egypt to accomplish their deliverance, and had brought them out of the land of their captivity with a high hand; he had fed them with angels' food, and had covenanted to bring them into the promised land. But now, when difficulty rose before them, they broke into rebellion, distrusted God, and complained that Moses had brought them and their children out of Egypt only that they

might die of thirst in the wilderness. By their lack of faith they dishonored God, and placed themselves where they could not appreciate his mercies.

Many today think that when they begin their Christian life they will find freedom from all want and difficulty. But every one who takes up his cross to follow Christ comes to a Rephidim in his experience. Life is not all made up of green pastures and cooling streams. Disappointment overtakes us; privations come; circumstances occur which bring us into difficult places. As we follow in the narrow way, doing our best, as we think, we find that grievous trials come to us. We think that we must have walked by our own wisdom far away from God. Conscience-stricken, we reason, if we had walked with God, we would never have suffered so.

Perhaps doubt and despondency crowd into our souls, and we say, The Lord has failed us, and we are ill-used. He knows about the strait places through which we are passing. Why does he permit us to suffer thus? He can not love us; if he did he would remove the difficulties from our path. "Is the Lord with us, or not?"

But of old the Lord led his people to Rephidim, and he may choose to bring us there also, in order to test our faithfulness and loyalty to him. In mercy to us, he does not always place us in the easiest places; for if he did, in our self-sufficiency we would forget that the Lord is our helper in time of necessity. But he longs to manifest himself to us in our emergencies, and reveal the abundant supplies that are at our disposal, independent of our surroundings; and disappointment and trial are permitted to come upon us that we may realize our own helplessness, and learn to call upon the Lord for aid, as a child, when hungry and thirsty, calls upon its earthly father.

Our heavenly Father has the power of turning the flinty rock into life-giving and refreshing streams. We shall never know, until we are face to face with God, when we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known, how many burdens he has borne for us, and how many burdens he would have been glad to bear if, with childlike faith, we had brought them to him.

In the hour of need we can gain no power by looking to our-

selves. Our eyes need to be anointed with the heavenly eye-salve, that we may discern our spiritual poverty and lack of faith. God is declared in all his dealings with his people; and with clear, unclouded eye, in adversity, in sickness, in disappointment and trial, as well as in prosperity, we are to behold the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus, and trust to his guiding hand. Remember the power and love God has shown us in time past. He "so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Then will he not find a way for us out of our difficulties?

By their doubt and unbelief God's people do much to grieve the heart of God, and tempt a withdrawal of his mercy. But through all, his love is unchangeable. The waves of mercy may be beaten back, but again and again they flow to the hearts of undeserving human beings. God loves his purchased possession, and he longs to see them overcome the discouragement with which Satan would overpower them. Let no thought of unbelief afflict your souls; for unbelief acts as a paralysis upon the spiritual energies. Do not magnify your difficulties, but keep the Lord in your remembrance, watching unto prayer.

And to us the Scripture comes: "Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a Son over his own house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness; when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart, and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." —*Signs of the Times*, September 10, 1896.