

REPENTANCE IN TORAH

Luke 24:44-47; Exodus 17:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

May 3, 2020

*"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.
And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled
and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"*

Exodus 17:6-7 (see also Numbers 20:1-13)

. . . and that rock was Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:4

The Scriptures and "what is written"

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you:

Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them,

*"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,
and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem."*

Luke 24:44-47

1) One _____, one _____

2) Repentance is the _____

3) In Torah, theology is mostly _____

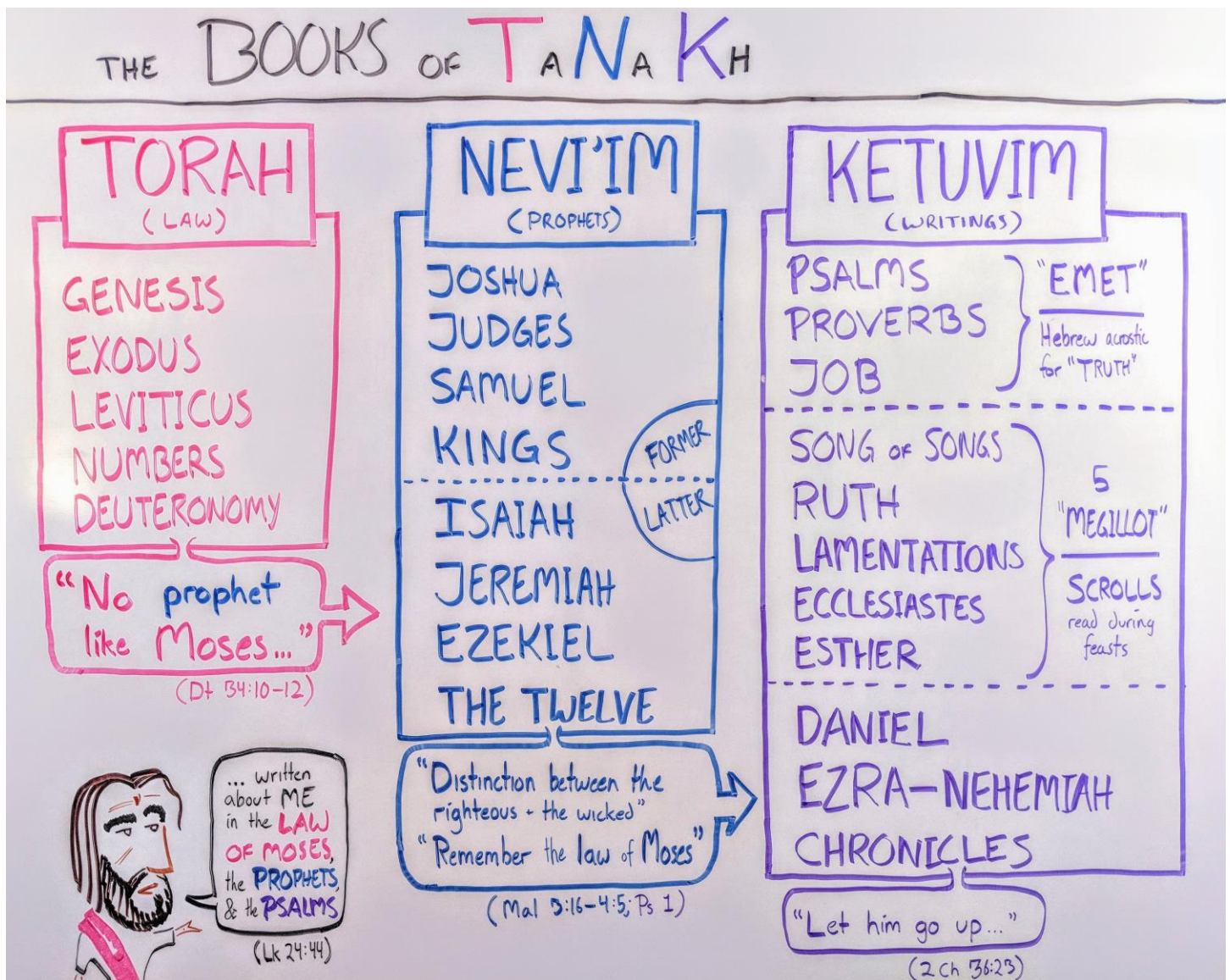
A second witness to the value of TaNaKh

Now these things occurred as an example to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did

These things happened to them examples and were written down as warning for us on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So if you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

1 Corinthians 10:6-13

- 1) Scripture has always been _____ looking for _____
- 2) We are living in the _____
- 3) Once again, _____ kills



Two methods to move from exegesis to hermeneutics

. . . and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets he explained [dia + hermeneuō] to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Luke 24:27

1) The “Christ-Centered” approach: getting to the s_____ place in the S_____

2) The “Four Pages” approach: especially for _____

1.

2.

3.

4.

3) Paul’s midrash approach (PaRDes, from literal to mystical)

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.

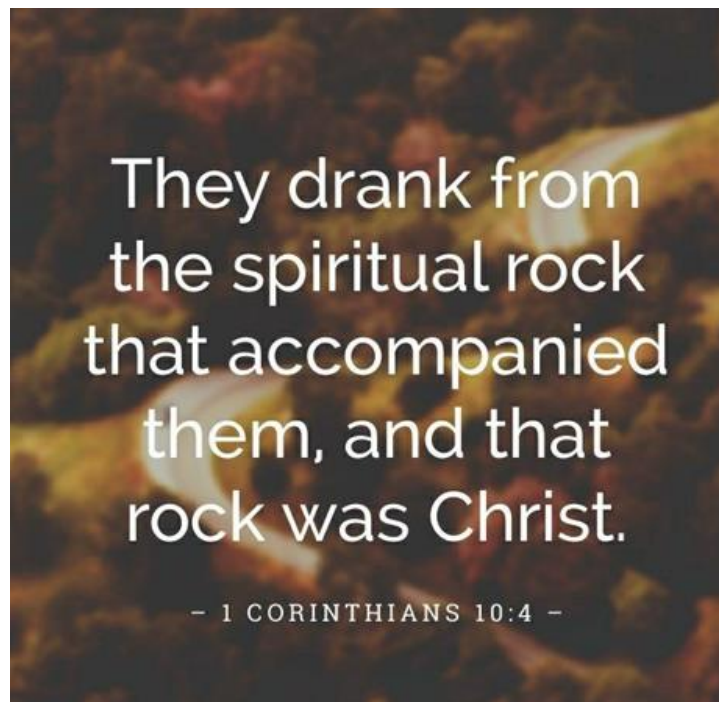
²They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

³They all ate the same spiritual food⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink;

for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

⁵Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4



“The rock was Christ”

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

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 the LORD to the test?”

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?” ⁴ Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

⁵ The LORD answered Moses, “Go out in front 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ And he called the place Massah ^s and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” Exodus 17:1-7 (see also Numbers 20:1-13; Deuteronomy 6:16 and more; Psalm 95 and 106 ; Hebrews 3,4)

1) Summarize the typology of this text. What are the important Old Testament parallels and New Testament discussions of this text?

2) What did I learn about the Suffering Messiah?

3) What did I learn about the Exalted Christ?

4) What did I learn about repentance and forgiveness of sins?

5) Application:

-- what is the Holy Spirit telling me about my relationship with the suffering and exalted Christ?

-- what is the Holy Spirit telling me about my role as herald to the nations?

Note: This week’s readings in Torah will be posted on Sunday.

Resources for “Repentance in Torah”

Spurgeon’s sermon on 1 Corinthians 10:12, “be careful lest you fall” at <https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/presump.txt>

Biblical Archeology Review at <https://www.baslibrary.org/biblical-archaeology-review/41/5/8> and <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/new-testament/water-from-a-walking-rock/>

Bunyan’s “The Jerusalem Sinner Saved” at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3270/3270-h/3270-h.htm>

Deffinbaugh’s sermon on the Exodus 17 at <https://bible.org/seriespage/grumbling-men-and-grace-god-exodus-171-7>

Henry Law’s *The Gospel in the Pentateuch* is an example of an older style of Old Testament typology at <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/law/The%20Gospel%20in%20Genesis%20-%20Henry%20Law.pdf>

Bryan Chapell’s *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Baker Academic, 2005) is my favorite contemporary book on Christological preaching in the Old Testament.

Paul Scott Wilson’s *The Four Pages of the Sermon* (Abingdon Press, 1999) is the preaching text used at Calvin Seminary.

I like J. C. Ryle’s short commentary on the Luke 24 at <https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/124.htm>

The Grumbling of Men and the Grace of God (Exodus 17:1-7)

Introduction

Several years ago I watched a movie which featured Malcolm Muggeridge. Standing beside the family plot in an English cemetery, this elderly Christian statesman spoke as one who would soon join those of his family who had died. I will never forget the way he contrasted his youthful dreads and desires with those of his old age. He said that those things which he felt were most desirable in his youth he now saw to be of relatively little importance, while those things which he dreaded in his youth had proven to be the richest experiences of his life.

I believe that Muggeridge is right. Those things which we think are most important often prove to be otherwise, while those things which appear to be undesirable, even painful, often prove most precious and profitable. Our text is an excellent example. The Israelites viewed the lack of water at Rephidim as a disaster and an indication that God had abandoned them to die in the desert. They questioned whether God was with them or not. In reality, God was with them in a way that was beyond their comprehension, a way that would be revealed centuries later by the apostle Paul. What first appeared to be an indication of God's absence proved to be one of the most dramatic illustrations of God's presence, provision, and protection. Let us listen carefully to the words of this text, for they offer encouragement to every saint who has ever questioned the presence of God in a time of personal crisis.

Massah and Meribah: Water From the Rock (17:1-7)

Leaving the Desert of Sin where God's miraculous provision of manna had commenced (cf. chapter 16), the Israelites went from place to place, as the Lord directed them. It is significant to note that God was in no hurry to bring the Israelites into the land of Canaan. While Israel's later "wilderness wanderings" were the result of their sin at Kadesh-barnea (cf. Numbers 13-14), the wanderings here are designed to serve as Israel's "boot camp" experiences. The events of chapter 17 occur while Israel is camped at Rephidim,¹⁷³ where there was no water for the Israelites or their cattle.

It is important to note that it was God who led Israel to Rephidim where there was no water. The Israelites traveled, we are told, "from place to place *as the Lord commanded*" (emphasis mine). While the cloud is not specifically referred to in our text, we have previously been told that God always led Israel by means of the pillar of cloud (in daytime) and of light (at night, cf. 13:21-22). While the Israelites are without water, it is apparent that it is God's will for this to be their dilemma.

Israel's response to the lack of water is no mere repetition of their previous actions,¹⁷⁴ however. Described here is an even greater transgression than we have seen previously. The Israelites should have learned to trust God to supply their needs, based upon His previous provision of water at Marah (15:22-26) and quail and manna in the wilderness of Sin (chapter 16). Furthermore, the Israelites did far more than just grumble, as they had previously done. Before this, the Israelites had grumbled against Moses and Aaron (15:24; 16:2, 7-8), but now they are quarreling¹⁷⁵ with Moses and about to stone him (17:4). Before, the Israelites asked Moses what they were to drink (15:24), but now they are demanding that Moses give them water to drink. Since Moses had been able to miraculously sweeten the waters at Marah and to produce quail and manna, the people appear to be demanding that he perform another miracle for them. It is as though he must prove he has God's authority to lead them by producing water miraculously.

It is bad enough that the Israelites argued with Moses and demanded that Moses provide them with water, but the text informs us that they were also challenging God here as well. Moses accused the people of "putting God to the test" in their quarreling with him (17:2). Since Moses' authority is due to his divine appointment (chapters 3 and 4), to quarrel with Moses is ultimately to dispute with God. The issue, however, is not only whether Moses had the right to continue to lead this people, but whether God was among His people. The challenge of the Israelites was, "Is the Lord among us or not?" Imagine this question being asked as the pillar of cloud, in which God was present and by which He revealed His glory and led them to this place, hovered in their sight. Moses' rebuke (that the people were putting God to the test) fell on deaf ears. They began to

rehearse their memories of the “good old days” in Egypt, contrasted with their miseries and near-certain death in the desert (17:3). Unable to dissuade the people, Moses could only cry out to the Lord for help (17:4).

God’s answer was that Moses should walk on ahead of the people. Among other things this indicated that Moses was making no retreat. It also reminded the congregation of Israelites that Moses was their leader, because when water was provided from the rock the people had to follow Moses to get to it. Some of the elders were taken along by Moses to witness, it would seem, this new miracle. (Did Israel’s hardness of heart prevent them from this privilege?) As commanded, Moses took along his staff—the same one with which he had struck the Nile (17:5). The Lord promised Moses that He would be standing before Him at the¹⁷⁶ rock at Horeb.¹⁷⁷ Moses was to strike the rock, causing water to flow from it. When Moses did this, water came forth in abundance, providing for the needs of the Israelites. He named the place Massah (test) and Meribah (quarrel), an epitaph which the Israelites would gladly have stricken from their history.

There are many scholars who would attempt to interpret this miraculous provision of water as a merely natural phenomenon. For example, there are those who suggest that there was a vein of water near the surface of the rock and that Moses just happened to hit this rock in the right place, so as to “uncap” the supply. This sounds more like the television description of how Jeb Clampett (of the Beverly Hillbillies) accidentally discovered oil on his place—a shot fired from his rifle accidentally released oil hidden underground.¹⁷⁸

The Meaning of Massah and Meribah

The incident at Massah and Meribah¹⁷⁹ is seminal in two very different ways. The events of this chapter are developed into two major themes in the Scriptures. First, Massah and Meribah becomes an epitaph of the hardness of the Israelites’ hearts (and not just that first generation) as well as for the Gentiles. Second, Massah and Meribah is an evidence of the grace of God and of His presence and provision for His people. We shall explore both of these themes and their relationship to each other.

Massah and Meribah: The Hardness of Man’s Heart

This incident is far more than a mere occurrence of corporate “temporary insanity,” as the contemporary excuse for sin is so often labeled. The Israelites were not just momentarily “out of sorts.” Unfortunately, this incident is typical of Israel’s stubbornness. Moses informed them that it was typical of their stubbornness and rebellion against God:

Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. Remember this and never forget how you provoked the Lord your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord. At Horeb you aroused the Lord’s wrath so that he was angry enough to destroy you (Deut. 9:8, cf. v. 24; Heb. 3:10).

The grumbling of the Israelites in the wilderness was therefore a persistent problem, not a rare and infrequent one. Furthermore, the sin of this first generation of Israelites was almost identically reproduced by the second generation of Israelites, some years later (cf. Num. 20:1-13). The problem of grumbling is one that is common to every generation, in every age. Thus, we find the events of Massah and Meribah frequently referred to in the Old Testament.¹⁸⁰ “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did” (Ps. 95:7b-9). The New Testament picks up “Massah and Meribah,” making this incident a lesson for contemporary Christians as well (cf. Heb. 3 and 4; 1 Cor. 10:1-13). We must therefore conclude that the problems which underlie Massah and Meribah are universal. Let us seek then to explore the nature of the Israelites’ sin here as well as the solution which God has for this sin.

(1) Israel’s actions at Massah and Meribah constituted testing¹⁸¹ God (Exod. 17:2,7; Deut. 6:16; Ps. 106:14). Israel’s lack of water was by divine design, for God was testing the Israelites by their response to adversity: “I tested you at the waters of Meribah” (Ps. 81:7; cf. Deut. 8:2,16). It was good for God to test the Israelites, for it revealed the sinful condition of their hearts. It surfaced their willfulness and waywardness and revealed that God was always blessing them on the basis of His grace, not their works. God has every right to test His creatures, and His tests are always for our good (Deut. 8:16).

On the other hand, no creature has the right to “put God to the test.” To do so is to demand that God prove Himself in a way that we dictate. God had proven Himself more than sufficiently in the miracles of the exodus. Israel did not lack evidence; they only lacked faith. If God were among them, then let Him prove it by giving them water, then and there. How arrogant! How inappropriate! How sinful! The creature demands that the Creator jump through his hoops.

(2) Israel’s demand that God prove His presence among them betrayed their lack of faith in Him. The Scriptures indicate that Israel’s actions at Massah and Meribah betray hearts which are hardened and unbelieving: “Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did” (Ps. 95:8-9). They did not believe His promise. They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the Lord (Ps. 106:24b-25; cf. Heb. 3:12, 19). “Like their fathers they were disloyal and faithless, and unreliable as a faulty bow” (Ps. 78:57).

Satan challenged our Lord to prove that He was the Son of God by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple, but our Lord rebuked him with a reference to the evil committed by the Israelites in putting God to the test at Massah and Meribah (Matt. 4:5-7). Satan had no right to challenge the Son of God to act in a such a way, for this would suggest that God is so unreliable He must be proven. The Jewish religious leaders persistently challenged Jesus to prove Himself by giving them a sign (cf. Matt. 12:38), a challenge which He refused to take up (cf. Matt. 12:39ff.).

When we demand that someone prove themselves to us we reveal our lack of trust in them. For example, the United States and Russia frequently attempt to come to some kind of nuclear arms agreement. The Russians persist at attempting to negotiate an agreement which has no “on sight inspections.” The United States insists that such “tests” be a part of the agreement. The reason for this insistence is simple—we don’t trust the Russians. Demanding that God prove Himself to us betrays our lack of trust in Him. It is not He who is untrustworthy; it is us. When we demand that Russia give proof of their integrity, we are wise. When we demand such proof from God, we are fools.

A beautiful illustration of the kind of trust in God which does not “put God to the test” is found in Daniel 3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow in worship to Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image, even when threatened with being thrown into a blazing furnace. When they spoke to the king, they said: “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (Dan. 3:17-18).

Faith trusts in God, even when the result appears to be fatal.¹⁸² The Israelites should have learned by now that God had promised to deliver them, not to destroy them, and that He had always protected them and provided for their needs, no matter how bleak things looked. And yet when they ran out of water, they doubt the presence of God and demand a miracle so that God may prove Himself to them once again.

(3) Israel’s actions at Massah and Meribah reveal their lack of patience. God would not have allowed His people to die of thirst, as they accused. Had they but waited, God would have provided for them. Their lack of faith was manifested in their impatience: “But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel. In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wasteland they put God to the test” (Ps. 106:14). In every instance where Israel lacked either food or water, Israel acted prematurely. God would have provided for His people’s needs in His own time, but this was too late so far as the Israelites were concerned. Unbelief is often hasty; faith is patient and endures.

(4) Israel’s response at Massah and Meribah were acts of disobedience. The first instance of thirst at Marah (Exod. 15:22-26) was an occasion for God to test His people (15:25), as well as to teach them: “If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you” (Exod. 15:26).

When Israel tested God at Massah and Meribah, God viewed their actions as disobedience: “But they put God to the test and rebelled against the Most High; they did not keep his statutes” (Ps. 78:56). “They grumbled in

their tents and did not obey the Lord” (Ps. 106:24; cf. Heb. 3:16,18; 4:6,11). The question we must answer here is, “Just what command of God did the Israelites disobey at Massah and Meribah?” The only commandments given so far have been general (15:26) and those which specifically related to the harvesting and use of manna in chapter 16. I find the key to be in the first verse of chapter 17: “The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of sin, traveling from place to place *as the Lord commanded*” (emphasis mine). The guidance which God gave the Israelites was by command our text informs us. When Israel resisted Moses and insisted that he had led them into the wilderness to die of thirst, they rebelled against the guidance of God, and thus they disobeyed His command. In the previous lesson, I likened grumbling to disobedience. Now, in the light of God’s commentary on this chapter, I must say that it is disobedience.

(5) At Massah and Meribah, Israel doubted God’s presence among them. It is an incredible thing that Israel could doubt God’s presence and power among them (17:7). God had evidenced His presence and power so many times in their very recent past—in the plagues, in their passing through the Red Sea, and in His provision of food and water. Moreover, God’s presence was manifested in the cloud (cf. 13:21-22; 16:11). Nevertheless, the absence of water causes the Israelites to suspect the absence of God.

Massah and Meribah: A Picture of God’s Presence and Power

The amazing thing about the incident at Massah and Meribah is that God graciously provided His grumbling people with water in abundance, through the rock at Horeb. In spite of the great sin of the people in disputing with Moses and in putting God to the test, they were abundantly provided for. Because of this, the rock at Massah and Meribah quickly became a symbol of God’s presence and power among His people. It is little wonder that the Lord is worshipped as Israel’s “rock” in the “song of Moses”: “I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just” (Deut. 32:3-4a; cf. also vv. 13,15,18). Psalm 95 begins, “Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation” (Ps. 95:1).

The rock of Massah and Meribah became the symbol of God’s presence with His people. From this time onward, the “rock” becomes a frequently employed term to refer to God’s faithfulness in providing for His people: “He opened the rock, and water gushed out; like a river it flowed in the desert. For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham” (Ps. 105:41-42). “But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the Rock I would satisfy you” (Ps. 81:16).

The “rock” of Exodus 17 is therefore employed as a symbol of Israel’s hope for the future, because it symbolized God’s faithfulness to His people in the past when He promises to be faithful in the future: “They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and water gushed out” (Isa. 48:21).

While the Old Testament saint came to view God as their “rock,” there was yet unfathomed meaning to this symbol which is revealed by the apostle Paul after the coming of Christ. Paul’s words are both profound and perplexing when he writes, “They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:3-4).

The Jews had a legend concerning the “rock” which tumbled along behind the Israelites in the wilderness, and some scholars seem to think that Paul somehow adopted it or modified it. The key to understanding Paul’s meaning when he speaks of Christ as the rock which followed Israel is the term “spiritual,” found three times in these two verses.

Paul could be spiritualizing the rock, using the term “spiritual” so that he can liken the experience of the Israelites to that of the Corinthians. Both had their baptisms (Israel in the cloud and in the sea, and unto Moses; the Corinthians in the baptismal waters, and unto Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 1:13-17; 12:12). Both also had their “spiritual food”—the Israelites had their bread and water; the Corinthians their bread and wine. Other explanations of this text have also been offered.¹⁸³

In what sense then is our Lord to be identified with the rock in the wilderness? I do not believe that we should go so far as to say that our Lord actually manifested Himself to Israel as a rock. The Lord told Moses, “I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb” (Exod. 17:6).

There is a world of difference between our Lord standing by that rock and being that rock. Nevertheless, our Lord was closely associated with the rock, as Paul suggests. This helps to explain why God saw Moses' act of striking the rock in Numbers 20 as such a serious sin, so serious that it kept Moses and Aaron from entering the promised land with the second generation of Israelites.

For our purposes, it is not necessary to struggle over the precise meaning of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10. What we do need to understand is that Paul informs us that God was present with the Israelites in the person of His Son. Although the Israelites believed that the absence of water in the wilderness was sufficient evidence for them to conclude that God had abandoned them, Paul tells us that Christ Himself was present with them.

Here is the irony of the passage. At the very time when the Israelites are inclined to doubt (or at least dispute) the presence of God, the text informs us that God was very present, and the New Testament goes so far as to tell us that Christ was present as well. Was God among them? More so than they could have dreamed!

The great wonder is how Israel's perception that God was absent could be so far from reality. How could the Israelites question God's presence among them when it is so obvious that He was present? I would like to suggest that the reasons why Israel doubted God's presence and demanded His provisions are the very same causes of doubt among contemporary Christians. The issue is this: "What are the evidences of God's presence and power whether in days gone by or today?" The answers which are commonly believed reveal the shallowness of our biblical and doctrinal understanding.

What are the evidences of God's presence and power we look for in the life of a person whom we believe to be godly? I would suggest that we, like the Jewish religious leaders of old, tend to look primarily at external appearances—success, popularity, a life free from struggles, suffering and sorrow. It is no wonder that our church leaders are so often chosen from the upper echelons of the socio-economic strata.

What are the evidences of God's presence and power which we look for in a church? Most often, we look at the size of the church, its staff, and its budget.¹⁸⁴ If there is a mood of excitement and we go away feeling turned on and having our needs met, we think that God is present in that church. Apart from the Jerusalem church in the early chapters of Acts, how many churches do you find in the New Testament which square with your standards for a "spirit filled" church?

This is why we find it very difficult to believe that God is present when things are not going well. We find it hard to believe that God would lead His people or His church into times and circumstances of difficulty. But when we think this way, we are no different from the Israelites. We doubt God's presence and power whenever the going begins to get tough. We fail to understand the necessity and importance of the school of discipline through which God puts all of His children (even including His Son, cf. Heb. 5:7-10).

Here is where the two major themes of our text converge, giving us a principle by which we can face the adversities of life with faith, rather than with fear, and by which we can trust God, rather than test Him: **GOD OFTEN REVEALS HIS PRESENCE THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH HE APPEARS TO BE ABSENT.** This principle is a reflection of the two principle themes of our text: (1) that the Israelites doubted God's presence and demanded proof of it; and (2) that God was far more present with Israel at Massah and Meribah than the Israelites ever knew. This leads me to generalize God's dealings with His people by pointing out that God uses those times in which we suppose He is absent to show us how real and present He is.

How can we be assured of God's presence with us? Let me briefly outline some of the assurances Christians have of the presence of God in their midst, especially in times of adversity:

(1) Our Lord's name assures us of His presence among us. When our Lord Jesus Christ came to the earth as a babe in a manger, we are told the meaning of His name: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'"—which means '*God with us*'" (Matthew 1:22-23, emphasis mine). The very name of our Lord, "Immanuel," assures us that God is with us in the person of Christ, just as Paul says He was present with Israel at Massah and Meribah.

(2) Our Lord came to the earth, not to be with those who were at ease, but to minister to those who were afflicted. When our Lord was questioned about His contact with “sinners” He replied, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). And when the Lord Jesus presented Himself at the outset of His ministry, He revealed Himself as the fulfillment of this prophetic passage: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19, citing Isaiah 61:1, 2).

(3) God sovereignly controls every detail of our lives. Thus, we are where God wants us to be, even when we are in danger or distress. We read in Exodus 17:1 that Israel was “traveling from place to place *as the Lord commanded*” (emphasis mine). In the place to which He leads us, God will be with us.

(4) God uses situations of adversity to draw us closer to Him. We are informed that Israel’s adversity was designed by God for their good:

“He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you” (Deut. 8:15-16).

Thus, the difficulties which come into our lives are under God’s sovereign control, designed to produce (in the final analysis) that which is good for us. Adversity is therefore not an argument for God’s absence but for His presence with His people (cf. Hebrews 12:1-13). Thus the psalmist can say,

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees (Psalm 119:67-68).

It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees (Ps. 119:71).

(5) God promises His children that He is always with them and that He will never forsake them.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you: never will I forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

(6) God’s Spirit has been given to witness to His presence within and to intercede for us, especially in times of adversity.

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. ... In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will (Rom. 8:15-17, 26-27).

I would like to suggest that while we do not look forward to those times of adversity and testing (God testing us, that is), these are often the times when God becomes most present and most precious to us. A great deal of divine discipleship is worked out in the quiet and lonely solitude of our own wilderness situations, when we perceive that apart from divine intervention and provision, we would perish.

All too often we think of discipleship in “warm, fuzzy” terms, rather than in “wilderness” terms. We like to think of discipleship as intimate fellowship and sharing with other Christians, and so, in part, it is. But to be very candid with you, most of the men whom God “discipled” learned obedience in the lonely “wilderness” experiences of life. So it was for Abraham, for Jacob, for Joseph, for David, and the apostle Paul, to mention but a few.

Discipleship is the process of being disciplined, so that we are learners and followers of Christ. Generally speaking, we come to our greatest levels of trust and of faith when God pulls out all else on which we rely and leaves us only with Himself. Discipleship is not a comfortable process. And thus we should expect difficulties to come our way, and at the very same time, expect our Lord to be as near (or nearer) than He has ever been.

Is it possible that you are in a kind of wilderness, my friend, even as you read the words of this chapter? Then I would suggest that God may have purposed this so that you could come to know Him, in a much more intimate way than you have previously known Him. Perhaps you have never yet come to know Christ as your personal Savior. God may have pulled out all the props of your life, as He did with Israel, so that you could come to the point where you have no one but a gracious and loving God in whom to trust—first for your salvation—and then for your sanctification (your growth in His grace).

If you are a Christian and you have entered into a wilderness experience, I urge you to trust and obey God, to look for Him in a way that you have not yet known Him. Just as God meant Massah and Meribah for Israel's good, He means your wilderness experience to be for your good as well. Ask God to reveal Himself to you in a new and fresh way, and He will do it.

173 “Rephidim has been identified with two places. The first is Wadi Feiran which leads up to Mount Sinai. Others have identified it with Wadi Refayid. This latter suggestion seems desirable because the name is similar to the biblical name and it is within several hours' reach of the wilderness of Sin.” John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), p. 184.

174 “This is the second of three accounts of murmuring caused by thirst (cf. 15:22-27; Num. 20:1-3): Marah-Massah, Massah-Meribah, and Meribah-Kadesh. ... In the first account (15:22-27) Yahweh provides Israel with a law or statute by which to test its faithfulness toward him. This account features the spirit of rebellion in the people. The third account (Num. 20:1-13 ...) cites Moses' own lack of faith.” J. Edgar Park, “Exodus,” *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), I, p. 957.

175 “This verb [quarreled] is the key word of the passage, explaining why the name ‘Meribah’ (‘argument’ or ‘strife’) is used for the place afterwards.” R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 134.

“The faultfinding with Moses ... has the nature of a legal argument. The people challenged Moses to justify his leadership by providing water; rather, they insist their thirst denies the validity of his position. The contention, says Moses, is tantamount to putting **the Lord to the proof** (cf. 16:7-8). The Hebrew verb ... means ‘to test,’ ‘to see’ (or ‘to doubt’) whether one will act in a certain way. It does not imply provoking one to act in a certain way, as the English verb **tempt** (KJV) now does.” *Interpreter's Bible*, I, p. 958.

176 The definite article (the) implies that there is a particular rock referred to here, not just any rock: “The reference is, it seems, to a particular rock on Mount Horeb. It is so interpreted by Josephus (*Antiquities* III. 1. 7) ... In I Cor. 10:4, Paul reveals his knowledge of this legend and seems to take it seriously, ‘The supernatural Rock which followed them.’” *Interpreter's Bible*, I, p. 959.

177 There is no consensus as to the meaning of “Horeb” or where it was located. For a discussion of this matter cf. W. H. Gispen, *Exodus*, trans. by Ed van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), pp. 166-167.

178 “The only reasonable explanation for this event is that God again intervened miraculously. It is not sufficient to argue that Moses struck a rock accidentally and due to the closeness of the water to the surface discovered the answer to his problem.” Davis, p. 185.

179 In the Old Testament and the New (e.g. Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3 and 4) the “Massah and Meribah” include a broader reference than just Exodus 17. Also included would be the later incident in Numbers 20:1-13, which involved the second generation of Israelites.

180 Some of the references to the events or imagery of Massah and Meribah are: Num. 20:1-13; Deut. 6:16-17; 8:15; 32:4, 13, 15, 18; 33:8; Neh. 9:15; Psa. 78:15-16, 35, 56; 81:7, 16; 95; 105:41; 106:7, 13-14, 25, 29, 32; 114:8; Isa. 48:21; 1 Cor. 10:1-13; Heb. 3 and 4.

181 “Testing as used here means to invoke the Lord's power, not in faith, but with challenge and irreverence, which is precisely what Israel was doing. It was an expression of discontent rather than a prayer.” Gispen, p. 165.

182 Notice, for example, how often death is referred to either directly or by inference in Hebrews 11.

183 Often in 1 Corinthians, the term “spiritual” refers to that which is produced by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual gifts, for example, are the gifts which the Spirit gives. So, too, the spiritual food and drink of the Israelites was the water and manna which God provided, as the “spiritual rock” is likened to our Lord, who miraculously accompanied His people.

184 Gordon MacDonald has recently written, “We assume that the larger the church, the greater its heavenly blessing. The more information about the Bible a person possesses, we think, the closer he must be to God. Because we tend to think like this, there is the temptation to give imbalanced attention to our public worlds at the expense of the private. More programs, more meetings, more learning experiences, more relationships, more busyness; until it all becomes so heavy at the surface of life that the whole thing trembles on the verge of collapse.” Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (New York: Oliver Nelson, 1984), p. 16. I highly recommend this excellent book for your reading.