

Moses and the Provision of God

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[0 : 0 0] still thinking about this time of testing, a testing of their faith, and where the people all too often are putting God to the test, we have a chance to think about Moses and the provision of God. Again, we sort of touched on this last week, but again, we're invited to recognize that all faith, all biblical faith, is tested faith. Some examples, James chapter 1, James the half-brother of Jesus, consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Joy in facing trials, as a follower of the Lord Jesus, because God is able to work in those trials to bring perseverance and maturity. Or 1 Peter chapter 1, it uses the image of refining, faith is refining, so that faith is refined so that it shines a treasure more precious than gold, bringing praise, glory, and honor to God himself. All faith is tested faith. Jesus said to his own disciples, if you want to be my follower, you must deny yourself. You must take up your cross and follow me.

And part of the test of faith that I think we can identify from the Israelite experience, Exodus chapter 17, is that question, perhaps a question that we've struggled with or find ourselves asking, it's the question of verse 7 in our text, is the Lord among us or not?

Is the Lord with me when I experience unemployment or illness or opposition and setback? Is he with us us as a church? Sometimes we feel like we live in a day of small things, where we feel like the church is largely ignored. Is the Lord with us? Perhaps if we see the church down the road seeing big things and great encouragement, in our testing times, can we depend upon the Lord to be with his people?

When things are hard, instinctively we want to know, don't we, there is someone with us and someone who is for us? Two iconic sitcoms, I guess, one from the 80s, one from the 90s. Cheers, for those of you who are old enough to remember Cheers, we want to go where everyone knows our name. The idea of having that place where there are friends who understand us and who are there for us, or in the 90s friends, of course, I'll be there for you when the rain starts to pour. You know, if that's true of friendship, we long for support. Isn't that definitely true for us in the life of faith? We long to know, is the Lord among us? Is he with us? Is he for us? We can identify with the testing that Israel's young faith is experiencing. You know, they have known what it was like to have the Red Sea at their back and facing the enemy Egyptians coming at their front. They have been tested with the bitter water that they couldn't drink. They've been tested in the wilderness where they had no food, and now there is no water, and now there are fierce enemies coming from behind while they're weary and tired, looking to destroy them. This in itself is a small enough sample, but it establishes the point that all faith will be tested. All faith is tested faith. Is the Lord among us? How does God answer that question?

How does he answer the question in chapter 17? How do we see the Lord providing evidence that he is for his people? How does he provide for them? We need to think about the staff and the rock and the hill.

[4 : 1 9] So that's where we're going to go. We're going to think about the staff that features in this story. Maybe you've read magazine interviews or listened to podcasts where the question is asked of a celebrity perhaps. What items are essential to your life? You know, if you're trapped on a desert island, what could you not live without? There are some Bible stories, aren't there, where an object, it seems to become so vital to a storyline. The story of David and Goliath, we always think of the five stones and the sling. Or we think of the story of Samson, and we always imagine that the jawbone or the lion carcass. Well, isn't it definitely true of the story of Moses? Because time and time and time again, Moses' staff keeps showing up. It was Moses' staff that was turned into a snake.

It was as Moses' staff struck the river Nile that it turned to blood. It was Moses' staff that parted the Red Sea. And now it's the staff that links these two stories together. There'll be water from a stone as the staff. It's the staff that it's called. It's the staff that it's called. It's the staff that it's called as a weapon of spiritual warfare as Moses prays. Why is the staff such a significant character, if we can use that word, in the story? What does the staff represent? Well, I think the staff of Moses is an invitation for the people to look and to see the Lord is present with you. The Lord's power is for you. In many ways, it functions for the people like the cloud, the pillar of a cloud and fire that always was with them. It's an act of God's kindness, demonstrating, I am with you. I am for you.

My presence and my power are here. It's an object lesson, again, that in every spiritual testing, we're invited to rest in this. The God of power is present with his people.

In our times of testing, perhaps when we feel spiritually thirsty, when we feel a sense of weakness and weariness, or if we're feeling spiritually opposed, we feel like we're in the thick of the battle, we too are invited to rest in the power and the presence of our Lord. He is and always will be among his people. We rest knowing our Father, that we are kept in his hands. We can trust in his goodness and his goodness and his wisdom. We trust the words of Jesus, his Son, our Emmanuel, the one who said, I won't leave you as orphans, I will come to you. The one who said, I'll be with you always. We rest and trust in the presence of the Spirit within our hearts, who unites us to Christ and all his saving benefits, bringing comfort to us.

So that in Christ, we have songs to sing to strengthen our faith. Psalm 23, a precious song for the people of God. He is with us when we go through the dark valleys. His goodness and mercy, they do follow us all the days of our lives. We do feast on the grace that the King provides. Psalm 46 is the song of the church.

[8 : 13] God is our refuge and strength. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is still a fortress for his people.

Is the Lord among us? Will he really provide for me? Absolutely. Absolutely. We can rest in the gospel promise.

We can rest in God's great provision because he's given us himself in his Son, the Lord Jesus. It was sinful of the people to test God, and we need to be aware of that. I want one more proof, one more sign that you're worthy of my trust. Like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, one more miracle, one more miracle. We're invited to rest and to trust God's word, God's gospel. The Lord is among us, and he is with us and for us. So that's the lesson of the staff. Let's think about the rock, the first half of the chapter. Israel's question, the testing, is the Lord among us or not? It is evidence, again, that they are slow to learn. The life of faith, sometimes it humbles us, doesn't it? We expect to make more progress in our life of faith than actually we seem to make. It seems to be often at one step forward and two steps back. Israel's slow to learn. They've seen and enjoyed so much of God's power and presence and provision. While they were still slaves in Egypt, God was showing he was for them by working those great, those plagues, those judgment on Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, and he was protecting the people all the while. In the Passover event, God provided for them the animal, the substitute, the blood that was sprinkled so the angel of death would pass over. In the parting of the Red Sea, God had provided for them. In raining down bread from heaven. But still, their grumbling, quarreling, testing, prove it, God. How are we better off following you rather than being back as slaves in Egypt?

[10 : 41] Sometimes there can be false expectations about the life of faith. Perhaps they expected, well, with God on our side, we can expect a life of faith without any testing.

Perhaps they were anticipating a road to glory without any suffering. Perhaps they were imagining it would be a life of lots of good things, but without any discomfort.

Sometimes, Bible teachers, churches can give a false impression of the life of faith. Come to Jesus, and your life will be wonderful. Come to Jesus, and health, wealth, and prosperity will be yours.

Faith will be tested. It's so clear from Scripture. It's often been said that faith is like a muscle, and faith grows through testing, just like muscles grow through testing. There is pain and endurance.

Now, I imagine, for any of us who are into physical exercise, we'd probably like to fast-track. We begin a campaign of fitness. We'd rather fast-track and get to the end result where we feel like a much healthier, fitter version of ourselves, but we need to go through pain and endurance to get there.

[12 : 17] And the people of God always need to learn that. I'm reading Spurgeon's devotions this week. He posed the question, have you ever asked, spoken to God, say, I want to go to heaven.

I wish I could just go to heaven. Spurgeon asks, how many times is that simply to be with Jesus? That was Paul's thing. I want to go to be with Jesus, which is better by far. Other times, perhaps it is the case that we just want to avoid all the trouble and the difficulties that we're having. It can be really hard to go through testing. And so we find the people here in verse 2, quarreling with Moses, saying, give us water to drink. And Moses replied, why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test? But the people are back complaining. Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst? It's interesting, they haven't learned their lesson. [13:24] They're straight back to grumbling, complaining. But Moses is understanding. Because Moses' response in verse 4 is to cry out to the Lord. He turns to God in prayer.

And God's answer is a wonderful public lesson, a public demonstration that he is present. He is powerful.

He is faithful in this and in every time of testing. And this is where the staff turns up. Verse 5, the Lord said to 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.

Oh, 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. Notice what's happening here.

So the same staff that was used at the Nile. So the river Nile in Egypt was the place of life. That's why so many people lived along the banks of the Nile and still do.

[14:28] But the staff, as judgment, turned the place of life into a place of death. But now Horeb, it's reversed, isn't it?

Here's this dead stone. But when the staff hits it, water flows, life comes. The dead rock gives life-giving water.

And the whole community can see. In this test, in every test, look to God your rock.

He provides. Don't test Him. Pray to Him and trust Him. We read 1 Corinthians 10, where Paul used this story along with others to teach the Christians in Corinth.

The rock in this story is Christ. We read in John 7, Jesus speak about being living water.

[15:32] Same in John 4. Jesus is the one who satisfies our deepest thirst. Jesus is the one who gives life.

What do we want as people? You know, truly, deep down. We have surface-level things that we would love to have. But deep down, those things that we share in common are going to be ideas like hope and security.

A sense of purpose. We want to know love. We want to know forgiveness. We want to experience freedom. Jesus comes and says, I'm the living water.

I'm the one who satisfies. I and I alone, fully, truly, eternally meet those deep needs. The Lord Jesus Christ is a source of hope for us in this life that we are vitally connected to our God.

Our sins are forgiven. And He has hope in the life to come. As we are united to Jesus, just as He died and then rose to new life, so we believe that when we die, we will pass to resurrection life.

[16:52] He gives hope that lasts. There is security found in Jesus. He is our rock. He is our foundation.

He is the cornerstone. That He gives purpose to life. That all that we do becomes an opportunity to do it for the glory of God.

Everything that we do, the most mundane things that we do as Christians, they all matter to God. Now, all of life is conveyed with meaning. He brings us the deepest love.

He brings us into a relationship with the living God. The one relationship that will never spoil. That will never be broken by death.

The one that will grow for all eternity. He is the one who gives us forgiveness. He is the only one who gives us peace of conscience and peace with our God.

[17:56] And He is the one who gives us true freedom. Freedom to live as God made us to live. Freedom to live within the good and wise limits that God sets.

Set free so that we might truly love God and love our neighbor with the grace that He provides.

Jesus and Jesus alone satisfies. In Moses' day at Mount Horeb, the rock was struck and life-giving water flowed.

Mount Calvary, Christ was struck. Christ was crucified. And as His blood flowed, so eternal life flows to all who believe.

That's the rock. But we've still got one last lesson to learn. And it's a lesson that we find from the hill. I imagine some of us have favorite battle scenes.

Maybe some of us will. If you like history, if you like Scottish history, maybe you really enjoy Bannockburn. If you're into books and movies, maybe it's some of those scenes from Lord of the Rings or Harry Potter or Star Wars.

[19 : 21] The Bible has some amazing battle scenes. David and Goliath. It has great examples of God fighting on behalf of His people.

The Red Sea is a great battle scene. Here's a good discussion starter while you're having your supper. What's your favorite battle scene in the Bible? I love this one. I think this one's a great image for the life of faith.

Because we've got two things going on, and we need them both. And so when we look down into the valley, we see Joshua and his soldiers. They're fighting, and they're in the heat of the battle. Their swords are drawn. But then we look up onto the hillside, and we have Moses, the elderly. We have Aaron and Hur, these men of prayer.

And in the heat of the spiritual battle, the staff is raised in prayer for spiritual victory. Moses said to Joshua in verse 9, Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites.

[20 : 26] Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands. It's a great image. Now, we can usefully ask ourselves, why is this conflict happening?

Verse 8, the Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. We discover in Deuteronomy 25 something about these Amalekites. We discover they are cruel, and they are cowardly.

They are like those predators that perhaps you watch in your documentaries. They look to pick off the weak and the injured. So, as Israel is walking through the wilderness, and as they are weary and tired, the Amalekites come and look to take advantage.

And what becomes clear in Deuteronomy and here in Exodus, is that this is a people group who have no fear of God. Rather, they set themselves deliberately against the Lord, His will, His people. It's clear to the whole region. Israel belongs to God, and God has a special purpose for His people. Amalekites deliberately fight against that.

[21 : 42] But this presents Israel with a whole new test. Now they have to fight. As they fight, they're going to discover again something they discovered at the Red Sea.

Exodus 15, 2 and 3, the Song of the Sea. The Lord is my strength and my defense. He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise Him.

My Father's God, and I will exalt Him. The Lord is a warrior. The Lord is His name. And so they're invited again to trust God, the God who is for His people, and who is against His enemies, the one who fights to ensure His people's salvation.

Well, verse 9 shows us, reminds us, that there is this war on two fronts. We have Joshua leading the army below. We have Moses leading up in prayer on the hill. And then in verse 10 to 13, we have the battle report.

Now as we read that battle report, I don't know if you noticed where the focus lay. Was the interest primarily in what was happening down below, or was it what was happening up on the hill?

[22 : 53] Well, listen to how it is written. So Joshua fought the Amalekites, as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning.

But whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up, one on one side, one on the other, so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with a sword. Where's the priority? Where's the focus? It's on the hands raised in prayer, isn't it?

As long as the hands are up, they're winning. As long as his hands are steady, praying to God, Joshua overcomes with a sword. Of course, both were needed.

But we see that Moses, God's appointed mediator, is vital to the victory. And then we get a couple of lessons from the battlefield in verse 14 and 15.

[24 : 00] Verse 14. Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered, and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I'll completely blot out the name of Amalek. What's the lesson?

The lesson for Joshua and for those following him is that God has promised future victory. God has promised future grace, and so they are invited to trust the God who has been with them in the past and in the present to be with them in the future.

And here's the other lesson. Moses built an altar and called it, The Lord is My Banner.

What's the significance of that? It's a reminder. The battle belongs to the Lord. The banner represented, here's where the commander-in-chief of the army is.

Here is where you should flock to. Here's where the strength of the army lies. There's a call to faith in God and His provision.

[25 : 01] Now, as we think about what's happening here in the valley, in particular on the hill, three questions for us to think about by way of observation and application. First, a question of temperament.

I don't know if that's something you think about. What is my temperament? Now, why do I ask that? Because I think typically we'll all either be activist types or we'll be more reflective types.

So that when a time of testing comes, there might be one of two instincts. One instinct might be, okay, I need to roll up my sleeves. I need to sort of get busy facing the challenge if you're an activist type.

Maybe if you're more reflective, your response to trouble is, I need to find a quiet place to think and to pray. This test shows, actually, we need both, don't we?

There is a danger for both and there's a need for both. The danger for, I guess, folks are prone to action is that it's easy to rush in without God, to rely on natural resources rather than God's grace.

[26 : 14] But there is, of course, a danger for reflective types. We can be entirely passive, hoping if I pray enough, God will remove all the obstacles and I won't have to do anything.

This text actually says to us, doesn't it, the Christian life is not either or, it's both. There are times when we need to pray and there are times when we need to act.

And wisdom from God will show us when. So at the AGM, we were thinking about wanting to make connections and build bridges with our community so that we can share the gospel.

And we spoke about community prayer walks. We need those, we need to be praying for our community. But we also need community engagement. To be serving, to be speaking. We need both.

It's not either or, it's both and. But a second question is what is the essential battle? If we were to ask, what's the essential battle here?

[27 : 28] What's the essential battleground of the Christian life? The key battleground when faith is tested is the prayer battle. It's the battle to pray. With the disciples, we need to learn, Lord, teach us to pray.

Teach us to pray because our battles are real. They're predominantly spiritual against wickedness, against lies, against injustice, against temptation.

Our mission is spiritual, to spread the gospel, to make disciples for the Lord Jesus. So we need to pray for spiritual help. We need to pray for spiritual dependence.

We pray to have grace and power and wisdom that comes from God, to love Him, to love our neighbor, to say no, to sin, to say yes to doing God's will. The last question to ask is this one, who is our man on the hill?

For the people then, they could look up and they could say, Moses, who is our man on the hill? We have Jesus. We have a greater mediator than Moses, indeed a greater Savior than Joshua.

[28 : 46] Remember, Joshua means God saves, Jesus means God saves. We look back and we remember the victory of our mediator, the Lord Jesus, on Mount Calvary.

His decisive victory over sin and death and the devil, bringing an end to guilt, our war with God, our separation from God.

and we have hope of His victory in our spiritual battles. The King who comes into the heat of the valley, into the battle, to be with and for His people.

In Him, we have strength. In Him, we have the promise of final and ultimate victory. And so, we take heart as we consider our man on the hill.

We recognize that unlike Moses, whose hands flagged, Jesus praying hands, they never get tired.

Isn't that a wonderful promise in Hebrews 7 that we have in Jesus one who ever lives to make intercession for us?

[30 : 06] at having worked for our salvation by living, dying, and rising. He now lives for our salvation by always praying to the Father on behalf of His people.

And His strength is infinite. His life is infinite. There's never going to be a situation that will ever find Jesus tired in heaven, lacking energy, unable to pray.

His hands never get tired. And so, we always have security. And as His people, then, we learn to look up when we are tested, when we find ourselves asking, is the Lord among us or not?

We look to Calvary. We look up the hill. We don't see a staff, but we see a wooden cross. and we see a Savior hanging there for our salvation.

We look up to heaven to see Jesus sitting, ruling, praying as our priest king. He is God's great provision in all of our testing.

[31 : 18] And so, we have hope. One final lesson Paul draws for us. As he looked back on the events of the Exodus, as he looked back on the testing and what we can learn from those tests, sometimes, when difficult times come, we think it's chaos.

But actually, Paul says, the testing that we endure, it all happens under supervised conditions. The one who's supervising is God himself.

1 Corinthians 10, 13. Paul wrote there, no, the NIV uses temptation, could equally well be interpreted testing.

No testing has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful. He'll not let you be tested beyond what you can bear.

But when you are tested, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. Never tested beyond what we can bear.

[32 : 32] God is faithful. God is faithful to give strength so when we're tested, either we'll have sufficient grace that we can rest in and give glory to God as we are tested, or he will provide a way out beyond the testing.

All faith is tested faith, but looking to Jesus, our mediator, God has has ■■■ob ,