

Title: The God at the rock was the God in the dock! - Exodus 17v1-7

Purpose: To try and get people to feel the drama of the chapter, that we will always try and push the blame on to God. To see God's amazing act of taking the blame and giving the invitation to people to accept Jesus as the rock that takes the hit and also provides living water.

INTRODUCTION

Q. How many people this morning, we can just a simple show of hands, have come across the TV show that goes by the name: **JUDGE JUDY?**

Now for those that this is completely new to - rather than explain it - I'm going to play a short compilation that will give you the highlights:

***** PLAY VIDEO CLIP COMPILATION - including the strapline of the show at the beginning *****

Q. Now can anyone, who has a very good memory, remember what the strapline was?

YES - **"The CASES are real, the PEOPLE are real, the RULINGS are final!"** (repeat)

Linkage to Exodus 17

This morning, as we turn over to **Exodus 17 and the opening 7 verses** - we are going:

- from what we called last week: **"the grumpiest chapter in the bible"**
- to one that perhaps climaxes with some of **"the highest drama anywhere to be found in the pages of Scripture"**

The structure

What I want to do is to walk us through what is, I would suggest, a three-part drama.

The stages of this drama fit comfortably into our strapline - so:

- | |
|---|
| Point #1 - The CASES are real - the people QUARREL against Moses |
| Point #2 - The PEOPLE are real - they turn and TEST God Himself |
| Point #3 - The RULINGS are final - the ROD comes down in judgment |

So then #1:

1] "The CASES are real" - The people QUARREL against Moses

Tagging along with a rag-tag bunch of Israelites

One of the things I like about books like Exodus and Numbers is that you find yourself each week tagging along with them on their travels.

And they really do seem to be quite a **rag-tag bunch of Israelites**, who if the truth be told, are **pretty well exactly like us:**

- **FOR ONE** - they are **VERY CHANGEABLE** - one moment they can be giving God their utmost for His highest - and then they can be moaning and groaning only days later.
- **AS WELL AS THIS** - they are those that seem to **suffer from** repeated bouts of **SHORT-TERM MEMORY LOSS!**

God provides water when they're in desperate need **YET** they still have it in for Him when there is a bit of a bread shortage.

Arrival at Rephidim - what we know

Well, today, we have arrived at this place called **REPHIDIM** (and in fact all the events of this chapter - **Exodus 17** - occur here) and there are **a number of things that we know**, either because we are **told** OR simply through a little bit of **observation**:

- **FIRST-OFF** - this is now only **the second month** of their travels
- **THUS FAR** - they have been **moving from place to place** and all the while **they have had WATER provided for them on a regular basis.**

Let's face it - you simply cannot survive without water in the **desert** for any great amount of time.

(This is the **wilderness**, the **desert** they are wandering in ***AND NOT*** something akin to **Salisbury Plains!!**)

- **AS WELL AS THIS** - they would, by now, have seen the **MANNA come everyday and then cease on the 7th day**, the Sabbath.

Very likely they have been around this pattern for a number of weeks - so it is getting to be something they are now reasonably accustomed to - it is now becoming commonplace.

- **ONE OTHER THING** - and that is **the strong sense of FAMILIARITY**.

It's hard not to sense **a bit of that typical Déjà vu** here -- and it comes across really in at least two places:

Firstly, reading **Verse 3** we get **the GRUMBLING**:

"...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?'"

(Their **WHINGEING & GRUMBLING** is almost familiar enough to be getting like their own personal "theme tune"!)

Secondly, something else that is **FAMILIAR** is the way in which Moses keeps telling them that their **COMPLAINT** is ***not*** really directed at him but at God:

Verse 2 **"Moses replied, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?'"**

Ok - well that gives us a brief flavour of things as we have arrived at Rephidim.

Is this "same old same old"

A question that begs to be asked is this:

Q. This episode (where once again we have "no water") is it just one more case of **"same old same old"**?

Q. Is it just a rather **"tedious repeat"** of what took place **in the last chapter bar one** where they ran out of water, got

discouraged (because the water was bitter) and then God simply supplies what they need through a miraculous provision (remember the piece of wood they throw in which heals the water)?

Illustration - things COMING TO A HEAD

As a kid growing up, I guess that I was probably pretty typical - rather untidy, somewhat lazy and therefore prone to making my mother annoyed.

Now being one of two - my brother and I would try and help each other out and from time to time the hastily communicated message would get transmitted along the lines of: **"You'd better watch out - Mum's on the warpath!"**.

Now what this meant was that we have now pushed her patience too far and you are, as a result, likely to get it in the neck regardless of whether your room just happens to be tidy or not. She will find something. Q. Does that sound familiar?

Now the truth is it wasn't my Mum's fault - it was simply that you can't keep pressing somebody's button without them eventually getting to the "point of no return" where THINGS FINALLY COME TO A HEAD.

Exodus 17 - The temperate dial turned up

Here in Exodus 17 what is pretty easy to see is that **the temperature dial is being clear turned up**.

***** The word GRUMBLING is now being upgraded to that of QUARRELING. *****

Hebrew 'Rib' (pron. 'Reeb')

Now this word **QUARREL** or **QUARRELING** in English does not really do very good justice to the Hebrew word '**reeb**' (Heb. 'rib') that it is translating - in fact you see the Hebrew word coming out in Verse 7 in the name that is going to be given in order to memorialise this location: "**ME - REEB - AH**" (Meribah).

If we wanted to reproduce the meaning more accurately: **"they lodged a complaint with Moses"** would be a lot closer to the meaning- you see this is where we begin to see that what we have here is the beginning of a COURTROOM DRAMA.

The word **QUARREL** is a **clear piece of LEGAL TERMINOLOGY** and Micah chapter 6 makes this connection very clear:

Micah 6 verse 1 "Listen to what the Lord says: 'Stand up, **PLEAD YOUR CASE** (there's our word 'REEB') before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.'"

What we have here is ***not* simply reaching a "FIT OF PEAK"** - they are QUARELLING TO THE EXTENT of actually **LEVELLING A CHARGE** in Moses direction.

Ready to stone me

If you're not too convinced yet as to the legal drama that is starting to unfold - you can see that Moses is fully aware of the seriousness of things because he comments to the LORD in Verse 4 that **"they are ready to stone me"**.

This is shaping up as a CAPITAL CASE where the charge upon which Moses is getting strung up is that of effective CORPORATE MANSLAUGHTER and the punishment that fits that crime is death by stoning.

This is a REAL CASE

So then, the FIRST THING we must recognise is that this IS A REAL CASE that is now being brought - a real grievance is being brought and Moses is clearly in the firing line.

Ok - #1 then "The CASES are real" - the people QUARREL against Moses - #2:

2] "The PEOPLE are real" - They turn and TEST God

The vocabulary of the passage - TESTING

We have been taking some notice of the VOCABULARY of the passage - the usual word GRUMBLING has now hardened into QUARRELING, into BRINGING & PLEADING THEIR CASE.

But this is not the only word that we do well to notice. **The second is this word TESTING** and it is **also flagged up for us** - so in reality the Scripture itself is giving us all the clues. We are *not* having to read between the lines here or really infer anything very much.

- When they were **3 days** into the desert and they had no water - Exodus 15 tells us that "God tested them"
- When they were **30 days** into the desert and they had no bread - Exodus 16 tells us that "God tested them"

This was what their travels in the wilderness was supposed to be all about.

Moses knew this, unfortunately the people were a little slow on catching on.

Looking back on the full-sweep of these wilderness years - Moses would enlighten the New Generation of Israelites that would soon forge their way into the promised land under Joshua's leadership:

Deuteronomy 8 Verses 2-3 "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

- SO NOW, here in Exodus 17 - when they are **in month no.2** and they have no water again -the Israelites turn everything around for, as Exodus 17 Verse 2 tells us ==> "**they now put God to the test!!**"

Word War II - Death Camps

At the end of Word War II when the allied soldiers entered the death camps of **Auschwitz** and **Dachau** and **Belsen**, although the soldiers were pretty war-hardened (after all they had just fought their way across Europe) when they saw the bodies piled up, the gas chambers still warm, the terrible atrocities they were so traumatized some just vomited.

They said to each other "Nobody will believe this" and so they took pictures - that's one of the reasons we have the evidence we have.

Those who became witnesses and those that wrote about this subject saw very quickly that this is one experience that automatically turns you into a philosopher.

You start to ask the big questions, it cannot be an academic exercise. You have to ask the question:

Q. How can this have happened?

Time Magazine, on the **13th May 1957** wrote an article with the title: "**Religion: The Sentencing of God**" and it was responding to a **smash hit play** that had been performed in **Manhattan** for just 3 weeks under the title of "**The Sign of Jonah**".

The play came from a **German Luther Pastor - Guenter Rutenborn** and was written immediately after the war in 1946 **for a Germany that standing shocked and beaten in the rubble of the Third Reich**.

In the play a lot of Germans who were part of the problem, part of all of this violence of the death camps, are brought out and accused. "**Q. Why did you do it?**" And you know what they always say? They say, "I was just taking orders. It's the next level up. Those are the ones to blame."

Then they bring the next level up, and "**Q. What does the next level say?**" This is a play now. They say, "Well, I was just taking orders too. It's the next level up." So then they bring in the next level, and "**Q. What do they say?**" "I was just taking orders," and suddenly it starts to hit them.

"That's right. It's the one at the top. We're not to blame. It's God to blame. God is the one. Why didn't God stop it? Why didn't God do something? How can you believe in a God who would allow such evil and suffering in the world?"

Ultimate vote of "no confidence"

And so here too in **Exodus 17** we come to what is no less than "**The ultimate 'Vote of no confidence'**":

Verse 7 "...he called the place **Massah** and **Meribah** because the Israelites **quarrelled** and because they **tested** the LORD saying, '**Is the LORD among us or not?**'".

In the beginning the people are saying to Moses - "Look you've killed us through your criminal incompetence, through your sheer stupidity". But now they are not just gunning for him, they're after God.

Q. Isn't this the way it goes with us?

Q. Don't we do this very same thing?

Maybe I should jog your memory's - perhaps you don't like the direction that your life is taking:

- That illness you suffered
- That job that has driven you to be on anti-depressants
- That spouse who no longer seems as perfect, as ideal as at the beginning

And you say: "**Q. Why have things gone so poorly for me? Q. How could God allow this to happen to me?**"

You see that there is **a lawsuit that we have with God in our hearts too**.

There's **a charge that we're levelling at God**.

Q. What's God's response?

The response is A TRIAL.

Yes - The CASE is real - The people QUARREL against Moses

AND - The PEOPLE are real - They turn and TEST God Himself #3:

3] "The RULINGS are final" - The ROD comes down in judgment

A courtroom drama

By stages it becomes ever clearer that Exodus 17 sucks us into the very centre of a COURTROOM DRAMA.

So that we're all on the same page - let me hang up the various LEGAL PIECES:

- **FIRST** - we've got **the CHARGE**. This is their "**legal quarrel**" - this is where they "**plead their case**".

Verse 3 is where the charge is read out:

"Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

- **THEN** - there is **the SENTENCE, the PENALTY** that they have in mind - this is nothing less than a capital case - as Moses says: "They are almost ready to stone me."
- **Q. SO WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?** Well Moses is told to go out in front of the people (in their sight) and to have WITNESSES (some of the elders of Israel) and to take in his hand "**the rod of God**".

The rod in ancient times was a very typical symbol of judicial authority - so for example you could think of the Romans - they had what they called the "FASCES" (pron. 'FASSEES') which was a bundle of rods bound together enclosing an axe with the axe-head protruding out at one end.

Deuteronomy 25 pictures how punishment was typically delivered:

"If the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall make him lie down and have him flogged in his presence with the number of lashes his crime deserves, but he must not give him more than forty lashes."

- **Q. SO WHO IS THE JUDGE?** Well Moses himself - as we see clearly in Exodus 18 - the very next chapter - is the one who is the JUDGE of all Israel.

And it must have been quite fearsome to the people because they have seen the Nile run red when Moses brought down that rod of judgment.

- **OK - SO Q. WHO THEN IS IN THE DOCK?**

And .here's the strange thing - it's not Moses even though his life seems to be at stake - because Moses is the one with the rod, the symbol of judgment in his hand.

Q. Who then could it be? Q. What about the people of Israel?

Surely they hadn't done anything wrong! They were just being trailed around from pillar to post in that wretched desert landscape!!

Though they had been delivered from a wretched slavery and "non-existence" at the hands of the Egyptians. Though they had been taken across the Red Sea, given water to drink, Manna from heaven everyday for over a month. Had guidance from a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night - nothing short of 24-hour, round-the-clock

protection.

And now all they can say is: "Q. So what have you done for me lately?!!"
THEY ARE SO GUILTY - AND THE SAD THING IS - THEY DON'T EVEN KNOW IT!!

Q. So who then IS on trial if it is not them?

Verse 6 gives us the answer where God says: " 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."

Nowhere else in all Scripture do we have God standing before anybody - people always stand before Him.

God goes into the dock, He gets into the place of condemnation. He receives upon Himself the full force of that Rod of necessary Judgment.

Too strange - too good to be true?

Now you might say - this is a lot of DRAMA.

You might say - this is really TOO STRANGE - TOO GOOD to be true.

Q. Can we really be clear that this is not just another peculiar way in which God is choosing to give water to the people?

Well, as we said so many times before, God simply doesn't do random. The apostle Paul makes solid the identification of this rock here in Exodus 17 - let me read **1 Corinthians 10** - and I'll just pick up the opening couple of verses:

(1 Corinthians 10 verse 1-4) "For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 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."

What's going on is that God is in the dock, it is God that is that Rock and God is it that takes the full force of the Rod of His own perfect and righteous judgment and He is executed. It is a picture, it is a foreshadowing of what will happen to Jesus the Son of God who takes away the sin of the world.

There's going to be a day when the Son of God will step forward into the very path of God's rod of judgment - He will feel the full force of the people's thirst - He will cry out I thirst and just like the Nile River that was struck and was turned into blood, He will be struck and will issue forth blood.

Maybe you remember what Jesus said in John chapter 7 (Verses 37-38):

"On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

This is Jesus invitation for people to believe in his coming death and to avail themselves of the water of life, that water that wells us to eternal life.

Maybe you are still struggling to believe in the death of Jesus as God's substitute for each one of us.

Right at the end of the play - "**The Sign of Jonah**":

- they say: "You're right. God is to blame. It's not us."
- they say: "Let us sentence him to death."
- they say: "Let him become a human being. Let him become a homeless person. Let him become a wanderer on the earth. Let him lose a son. Let him die, and when he dies, let him be ridiculed and disgraced."

The RULING IS FINAL

You know, even in the courtroom of Judge Judy - THE RULINGS ARE FINAL.

Every time, every episode a JUDGMENT will be handed down - it has to be.

When you read the eyewitness accounts of the soldiers who arrived at the death camps, we know that they just started shooting and clubbing the guards to death.

Q. Why did they do that?

Because they knew that the only way to deal with such incredible evil was judgment.

They needed to see a judgment handed down.

More than that, by dehumanizing the guards they were keeping from themselves the fact that we all too deserved to be judged.

You see:

The CASES are real - this is *not* something merely ACADEMIC - *not* something merely "out there"

The PEOPLE are real - AND THEY ARE "JUST LIKE US" - ultimately they turn it back on God

The RULINGS are final - the ROD has come down - and that leaves YOU with a FINAL DECISION:

As Scripture says:

"...Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."

As Jesus Himself said:

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Q. Are you not thirsty?

Let us pray a moment ...

AMEN