

## "Smite the rock."

Exodus 17: 6.

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The difficulties of scripture, when opened to simple faith, are amongst its chief beauties and its strongest confirmations. God has not written His word to perplex souls but to exercise their hearts in dependence on Him and confidence in Him. When a supposed discrepancy, as unbelief would suggest, turns out to be a two-fold lesson of distinct truths, how encouraging to the believer, who thus finds in the word, not a dead wall that forbids our passage, but a door that opens to faith with a beautiful prospect which it is for us to enjoy on both sides! Let me exemplify this in "the rock" of the second book of Moses compared with that of the fourth, which scepticism will have to be nothing but two different accounts of the same transaction, and of course equally fabulous. The believer knows that they are wholly distinct, one in the first year of Israel's departure from Egypt, the other in the last year of their sojourn in the wilderness; each of them absolutely true, both of them not only highly instructive but divinely prophetic, and therefore not written by Moses simply but as inspired of God, who had ever before Him the glory of Christ and the blessing of His children.

This deeper character is intimated by 1 Cor. 10: 1-11. And as the Lord Jesus warrants our seeing in Ex. 16 Himself the true bread of God coming down from heaven, we may well look for a kindred type in Ex. 17.

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." Such is unbelief, ever forgetful of grace, ever turning to second causes. God was not in the thoughts of Israel, who only chide Moses. It was tempting Jehovah, that is, doubting His presence in their midst, and this to care for them, after He had given the most magnificent and varied proofs of His power on their behalf, and this up to the last moment. Why not ask water of Him who had given them flesh at even, and filled them with bread in the morning? Well might Moses say, "Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the *LORD*?" (ver. 1, 2).

But unbelief is as dull to learn as ready to murmur, as swift to speak as slow to hear. "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" (ver. 3).

Not so Moses, who "cried unto the *LORD*, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me" (ver. 4).

The Lord will be enquired of: it is all-important for man; but He has His own way. As His end is that He is very pitiful and of tender mercy, so His beginning is goodness without limit where failure is impossible. But man needs to learn by his misery and need, ever prone to forget it through misuse of His very mercies. How blessed that God acts for His own glory!

"And the *LORD* said unto Moses, 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?" (ver. 6, 7).

"Now the rock was the Christ." Such is the comment of the New Testament in direct allusion to

the fact before us. The truth is greater and more abiding than the wonder.

It is not only the bread of God in Him that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. More than this is wanted in view of the sinner's need and of God's glory. The Son of man *must be* lifted up. The power of evil must be crushed; God's character must be vindicated; sins can only be forgiven righteously, because borne and judged: all meet in the precious death of our Lord Jesus. The rod of judgment, "wherewith thou smotest the river," must smite the rock. Christ suffered once for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God. Love, infinite love, there was in Him thus given to die for us; but He was rejected and put to shame; yea He was forsaken of God, whose face was hid from Him when He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. It was not merely that unbelieving Jews esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. In very truth He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities and the chastisement of our peace was as surely upon Him, as we are healed with His stripes. Jehovah laid on Him the iniquity of us all; and the stroke was on Him for the transgression of His people. It pleased Jehovah to bruise Him, to put Him to grief, to make His soul an offering for sin. He bore iniquities; He poured out His soul unto death; He was numbered with transgressors; and He bore the sin of many.

If souls fail to see and bow to this most solemn and affecting testimony of God to the humiliation and suffering of His own Son, it is not for lack of plain words and forcible figures. The real difficulty is in the will of man, which refuses the overwhelming demonstration of its own badness and of God's goodness. For if this be the truth of the cross of Christ, what grace and long-suffering and holy love on God's part? what vanity and pride and malice, what hatred of the Father and the Son on man's? The very cross, whereby peace and deliverance comes, is the absolute condemnation of sin: were it in our person, it must be ruin irretrievable; in Christ it is our salvation.

But there is more here. "Smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink." It is the type of the Holy Ghost given. This gift consequent on Christ's work goes far beyond new birth. Now that redemption is effected, the Spirit is within the believer a fountain springing up into life everlasting, yea, a river flowing out in testimony of Jesus glorified. As having believed in Christ we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of God's glory.

Can any prefiguration be conceived clearer or more important? Not that Moses knew all this beforehand; but that all was naked and open before His eyes, with whom we have to do now, as He inspired him then. May we be not faithless but believing.