

## **THE LORD WILL NOT FORSAKE YOU**

*17 The entire congregation of the children of Israel set out from the wilderness of Sin, traveling from place to place as Jehovah commanded. Then they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup>Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water so that we may drink!" And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why are you testing Jehovah?" <sup>3</sup>The people thirsted for water there; and they grumbled against Moses, saying, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, was it in order to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" <sup>4</sup>Then Moses cried out to Jehovah, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me!" <sup>5</sup>Jehovah said to Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the River. Now go. <sup>6</sup>I will stand before you there by the rock at Horeb. You are to strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. <sup>7</sup>He called that place Massah and Meribah, because of the children of Israel's quarreling and because they tested Jehovah, saying, "Is Jehovah with us or not?"*

*<sup>8</sup>Then the Amalekites came and fought against Israel in Rephidim. <sup>9</sup>Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out to fight against the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." <sup>10</sup>So Joshua did as Moses instructed him and fought against the Amalekites, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup>As long as Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed; but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites prevailed. <sup>12</sup>When Moses' arms grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady until sunset. <sup>13</sup>So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sword. <sup>14</sup>Jehovah said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and recite it in Joshua's hearing: I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." <sup>15</sup>Then Moses built an altar and called it, "Jehovah is my Banner." <sup>16</sup>And he said, "Jehovah has sworn: Jehovah will wage war against the Amalekites from generation to generation." (Ex. 17:1-16)*

### **Introduction**

The wife of a home missionary writes, "A day one winter stands out like a boulder in my life. The weather was unusually cold, our salary had not been regularly paid, and it did not meet our needs when it was. My husband was away much of the time, traveling from one district to another. Our boys were well, but my little Renee was ailing, and none of us were decently clothed. I patched and re-patched, with my spirits sinking to the lowest ebb. The water gave out in the well, and the wind blew through cracks in the floor. At the time when I needed it most, my faith began to waver. Early in life I had been taught to take God at His Word, and I thought I had learned the lesson well. Now a daily prayer of forgiveness was all I could offer.

“Christmas was coming; the children always expected their presents. The boys were each craving a pair of skates, and Renee wanted a nice new doll. I knew it seemed impossible, but oh how I wanted to give each child their present. It seemed as if God had deserted us.

“The morning before Christmas my husband, James, was called to see a sick man. I packed a piece of bread for his lunch, it was the best I could do. That was a dark and hopeless day. I coaxed the children to bed early. When Renee was tucked in, I listened to her prayer. She again asked the Lord for a doll, and skates for her brothers. With a bright face she whispered to me, ‘I think they’ll be here early tomorrow morning, Momma.’ I sat alone and gave way to the most bitter tears.

“Before long James returned, chilled and exhausted. He pulled off his boots; the thin socks slipped off with them, and his feet were red and cold. ‘I wouldn’t treat a dog that way, let alone a faithful servant.’” I said. Then as I glanced up and saw the hard lines in his face and the look of despair, I could tell that James had let go, too. He took my hand and we sat for an hour without a word. I wanted to die and meet God, and tell Him His promise wasn’t true; my soul was so full of rebellious despair.”

There are times in life when, like this Christian lady, or like Old Testament Israel, we are tempted to think that the LORD has forsaken us. But because He is the LORD, the covenant God, He cannot forsake His children in Christ.

### **I. The LORD Will Not Forsake You, Even Though He May Bring You into Very Extreme Trials**

When we come to Exodus 17 we find the children of Israel journeying down into the extremely barren and mountainous wilderness of the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. They have been journeying along the western side of the Peninsula, a desolate region, but now they enter the very heart of this wilderness. Here we find them encamped at a place called Rephidim, a place where there was no water.

Since departing Egypt for the Promised Land of Canaan, Israel has encountered numerous trials, and now they face yet another trial, this one more severe than the previous. The waters of Mara (Exodus 15) were bitter, even to the point of being undrinkable, but at least there was water. There was a resource, (bitter water though it was), with which the LORD could work and change into sweet water. In the Wilderness of Sin (Exodus 16) there was no bread and they had used up their provisions; but, if need be, they could have begun to slaughter their cattle for food. But now, at Rephidim, they encounter their most severe trial to date: there is no water, there is nothing at all down here.

Why has the LORD brought His people, His chosen ones, to such a place as this? He has done so in order to reveal Israel’s heart, and His heart.

How does Israel react to this situation? They quarreled with Moses (vs. 2.) At Marah they murmured against Moses, there was a tremor of unrest (Ex. 15:24.) In the Wilderness of Sin the whole congregation murmured, now there was a rumble of discontent (Ex. 16:2.) Now here at Rephidim there is open hostility against Moses, they are almost ready to stone him (Ex.17:4.) Then the people make an impossible demand of Moses: *"Give us water"* (vs. 2.) It is no longer a legitimate question, as was posed at Marah, *"What shall we drink?"* nor is it an appeal, it is a defiant demand. Their demand is defined by Moses as a tempting and testing of the LORD, he confronts them with the question, *"Why do you put the LORD to the test?"* (vs. 2.) It is one thing to humbly petition the LORD for our needs, indeed, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray to our heavenly Father, *"Give us this day our daily bread"* Matt. 6:10,) but it is quite another thing to defiantly make demands of Him.

What will the LORD do with these people?

The Israelites have shown themselves to be ungrateful: never thanking the LORD for His past provisions. Contrast Exodus 15:1, (*"I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted"*) a type of heavenly praise, with the silence that is found in Exodus 15:24-25,27 and Exodus 16:14-15,

*The people grumbled against Moses, asking, "What shall we drink?"* <sup>25</sup>*Moses cried out to Jehovah. Then Jehovah showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the waters and the waters became sweet. ...*<sup>27</sup>*Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there by the waters.* (Ex. 15:24-25,27)

*When the dew was gone, there lay on the surface of the wilderness thin flakes, like frost on the ground.* <sup>15</sup>*When the children of Israel saw it, they asked one another, "What is it?" for they did not know what it was. Then Moses told them, "It is the bread that Jehovah has given you to eat."* (Ex.16:14-15)

In neither of those last two instances do you find the children of Israel offering up thanksgiving to the LORD for His gracious and faithful provisions. Apparently, the mercies of the LORD were taken for granted by Israel, ...is the same true with us? In our lives is there the same pattern of loud complaining in the face of trial and adversity, but silence when the LORD provides His gracious provisions?

The Israelites have shown themselves to be unteachable; they have not learned from their past trials, it is as though those trials have been wasted on them. Note the re-occurring pattern: 1) a God-ordained encounter with trial; 2) the insufficiency or the exhaustion of all human resources; 3) the need to look in complete dependence to the LORD, relying upon His ability, His mercy, and His faithfulness; and 4) then comes the LORD's all-sufficient provision for their needs and deliverance.

The Israelites have not become like their father Abraham. Faced a severe trial, the requirement of offering up the promised son, Abraham said (to Isaac his son), *"God will provide"* (Gen. 22:8.) On the contrary, the Israelites have viewed their trials as distasteful annoyances, disrupting their lives and delaying their journey to the Promised Land. They have failed and refused to see those trials for what they are: meticulously prepared works of God designed 1) **to produce spiritual maturity and fruit in the lives of His people** (note John 15:2b *"my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>... he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it may bear more fruit"*) and designed 2) **to reveal His glory to them** (cp. John 11:20, Jesus said to Martha as they stood before the tomb of her brother Lazarus, *"Did I not tell you that, if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"*)

What does the LORD do?

He offers Himself as their Servant: *"I will stand before you ... by (or, upon) the rock"* (vs. 6.) The Hebrew phrase used here frequently denotes the attitude and posture of a servant standing before his master, (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentaries on the Old Testament, The Pentateuch*, Vol.2, p.77.)

He sacrifices Himself for their sake. The LORD instructs Moses, *"You are to strike the rock, and water will come out of it"* (vs. 6.) Here the LORD is graphically allowing Himself to be struck for the salvation of His people. He would permit Himself to undergo a far greater "striking" upon the cross of Calvary. In anticipation of that "striking," the prophet writes, *"Surely he has borne our afflictions and carried our sorrows; but we regarded him as one who was stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted [as an evildoer]"* (Isa. 53:4).

The LORD will not forsake you, even though He may bring you into very extreme trials. When He does so, bear in mind that it is designed by the LORD to produce spiritual maturity and fruit in your life and to reveal to you His glory.

## **II. The LORD Will Not Forsake You, Even Though You May Be Subjected to Demonic Assault**

As Israel breaks camp in this rugged wilderness of Rephidim, just after the LORD has graciously supplied them with water, they are attacked by the Amalekites. Here was a cruel, indeed, a demonic attack by a heartless, merciless enemy, note the commentary provided in Deuteronomy, *"Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. <sup>18</sup>When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God"* (Deut. 25:17-18.)

Who were the Amalekites? They were a fierce nomadic tribe living in the desert wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. Amalek was the grandson of Esau (Gen. 36:12)—Esau was the twin brother of Jacob (Israel)—whose descendants became the archenemy of Israel. What we find here is no mere squabble

between two nomadic tribes, no mere dispute over land and water. On the contrary, what is involved here is nothing less than that spiritual warfare that traces its origins back to Jacob and Esau, and back to the distinction God made between the offspring of the woman (i.e., the redeemed) and the offspring of the serpent (i.e., the world of unconverted mankind under the dominion of the devil.) Here is an occurrence of that spiritual conflict first foretold back in Genesis 3:15, *“Jehovah God said to the serpent, ... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”* This incident is an episode in that spiritual warfare; and, consequently, it is a demonic assault upon the children of Israel.

At what times are you most likely to encounter this type of demonic assault? One such time is just after the LORD has revealed His glory to us. This attack occurs immediately after the LORD's gracious and miraculous provision of water. Consider a similar circumstance in the life of the Apostle Paul described in 2 Corinthians 12:7, *“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given to me a thorn (or, a stake) in my flesh, a messenger from Satan, to torment me.”* After God has done a great work on behalf of His people, He sometimes permits the devil to launch a counter-offensive; but always on a limited level, never matching or exceeding the work of God. Another time when we may expect to encounter a heightened degree of demonic opposition is just before the LORD is about to perform a mighty work of grace or deliverance. The ultimate instance of this is to be found in the events of our Lord's trial and crucifixion, as He declares to His enemies, *“this is your hour, and that of the power of darkness”* (Lk. 22:53b.) In this passage the Lord Jesus describes the spiritual condition that prevailed at the time He went to Calvary to accomplish the ultimate work of grace and victory. Yet another time when we may expect to encounter a heightened degree of demonic opposition is when you find yourself in a weak and exhausted condition (spiritually or physically.) As noted, this was the case with Israel when they were attacked by the Amalekites. It was also the case when Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness: *“After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came to him ...”* (Matt.4:1-3.)

At times the LORD will hand His children over to the devil as a chastisement for willful and defiant rebellion. Note that the announcement of Amalek's attack (Ex.17:8) comes immediately after the statement that Israel had tested the LORD (Ex. 17:7.) A New Testament example of this phenomenon is found in 1 Corinthians 5:5, where the Apostle Paul instructs the Corinthian church, *“deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his sinful nature, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus.”* Here is a passage that speaks of the discipline enacted against a Christian man who persisted in sinful conduct.

The LORD will not forsake you, even though you may at times be subjected to demonic assault. Just as Joshua won the victory over Amalek (Ex.17:13,) so the Lord Jesus has won the ultimate victory over the devil, speaking in anticipation

of the cross, Jesus declared, *“Now has come the judgment of this world; now the prince of this world shall be cast out”* (John 12:31.) Just as Moses interceded for the children of Israel, so the Lord Jesus intercedes for us. As part of that intercessory prayer, our Lord petitions His Father, *“I am not asking that you would take them out of the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one”* (Jn. 17:15.)

### **III. The LORD Will Not Forsake You; Rather, He Will Prove Himself Wonderfully Faithful**

The LORD proved Himself to be wonderfully faithful to the children of Israel. When His people were in need of water, the LORD condescended to be their divine Servant and supply their need. When His people were viciously assaulted by the Amalekites, the LORD rose up and asserted His divine power and dominion to win the victory on their behalf.

The LORD proved Himself to be wonderfully faithful to that home missionary pastor and his family. That pastor’s wife continues their story ...

“As James and I sat together in silence and rebellious despair, we heard a loud knock at the door. There stood Mr. White. ‘A box came by express just before dark. I reckoned it might be for Christmas, so I brought it by as soon as I could,’ he explained.

“Without speaking, James found a chisel and pried open the box. He first drew out a thick red blanket; underneath it was a trunk full of clothes.

“It seemed at that moment as if Christ fastened upon me a look of reproach.

“James sat down and covered his face with his hands. ‘I can’t touch these things!’ he exclaimed. ‘I haven’t been true, just when God was testing me. ... I know now how to preach the awfulness of turning from God.’

“The box contained a warm suit of clothing for James, a new dress for me, a pair of arctic overshoes for everyone, new suits for the boys, and a little red dress for Renee.

“Also contained in the box was a note quoting Isaiah 41:13, *‘I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, Fear not, I will help you.’*

“And at the bottom of the box there were two pair of ice skates and a beautiful wax doll.” (*Pioneer*, Nov/Dec, 1983)

The LORD will prove Himself to be wonderfully faithful to us, too, as we trust Him. In the words of the hymn writer, Frances R. Havergal,

Every joy or trial falls from above,  
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love.  
We may trust Him fully all for us to do,  
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.