

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Seventeenth Week - Monday

WATER FROM THE ROCK

*"Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of Yahweh, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, 'Give us water, that we may drink.' So Moses said to them, 'Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt Yahweh?' . . . So Moses cried out to Yahweh, saying, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!' And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.' And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel" (Exodus 17:1-6).*

Nothing particular is recorded of the onward march of the Israelites till they reached a place called Rephidim, which appears to be just one day's journey short of their destination to the base of the central mountains of Sinai. Their entrance into this mountain wilderness is generally supposed to have been through the Wady Feiran, a broad valley which is overspread with vegetation and tamarisk trees, or occupied with gardens and date plantations. It is now much frequented by the Bedouins for pasturage.

Here they again lacked water, and their murmurings were now more violent and their conduct more outrageous than back at Marah. We had then some sympathy for them and were inclined to plead some extenuating circumstances in their behalf. But we have not a word to say for them now. Their behavior is most flagrant, and the harshest judgment cannot estimate their offense too severely. They had lately seen their needs relieved in a similar emergency, and at this very time they were receiving, day by day, their daily bread from heaven. Yet so strangely unreasonable was their spirit that they reproached Moses for having brought them out of Egypt to kill them and their children and their cattle with thirst! In the space of one little month the ransomed people were prepared to deal with their deliverer by stoning him--he, Moses! whose toil and thought was continuously spent for their advantage. The Lord refrained from declaring his own displeasure, most likely in order that Moses might not be plunged into deeper discouragement. He simply indicated the mode in which he meant to provide for their needs.

There was something remarkable in this. The people were to remain in the camp, but Moses,

attended by the elders of Israel and having the rod in his hand, was to proceed onward to Horeb. There he was to smite a rock, from which a copious stream of water should flow out. It is usually, but erroneously, supposed that the miracle was worked at or close by the encampment. But if this had been the case, the Israelites, in their parched condition, would doubtless have gladly accompanied their leader on his mission. The account of the selection of elders and their going to Horeb implies that there was some considerable distance to go, and this is also implied in the words that follow: "And Moses did so in the eyes of the elders of Israel"--clearly in the eyes of those who would be witnesses.

If the camp at Rephidim was at the spot indicated, it was a good day's journey from Sinai, and so situated that a stream of water flowing from Horeb would run directly to it. The waters of the rock thus smitten, flowing in a downward stream through the valleys, is doubtless that alluded to in other passages. Thus in a later day Moses says: "Then I took your sin, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it and ground it very small, until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that descended from the mountain" (Deut. 9:21). The water may have flowed over a distance of miles to the camp at Rephidim. The Psalmist writes: "He also brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers" (Ps. 78:16). Dr. Wilson states,

The rock, too, may have been smitten at such a height, and at a place bearing such relation to the Sinaitic valleys, as to furnish in this way supplies of water to those Israelites during the first of their journeyings "from Horeb by way of Mount Seir, unto Kadesh-barnea" (Deut. 1:2). On this supposition new light is thrown upon the figurative language of the apostle, when he speaks of the "rock following" the Israelites--meaning the stream from the rock. On this supposition, also, we see why the rock should have been smitten to yield a large supply to flow to a distance, even though springs and rills may have been pre-existent in Sinai.

Keeping these considerations in view, it must be admitted that the remarkable rock in Sinai, which tradition regards as the one which Moses smote, is well chosen. It is an isolated mass of granite nearly twenty-feet square and high with its base concealed in the earth (we are left to conjecture to what depth). In the face of the rock are a number of horizontal fissures at unequal distances from each other, some near the top and others a little distance from the ground. An American traveler, Dr. Olin, says:

The color and whole appearance of the rock are such that, if seen elsewhere and disconnected from all traditions, no one would hesitate to believe that they had been produced by water flowing from these fissures. I think it would be extremely difficult to form these fissures or produce these appearances by art. It is not less difficult to believe that a natural fountain should flow at the height of a dozen feet out of the face of an isolated rock. Believing, as I do, that the water was brought out of a rock belonging to this mountain, I can see nothing incredible

in the opinion that this is the identical rock, and that these fissures and the other appearances should be regarded as evidences of the fact (*Travels in the East*).

A still later American traveler, Dr. Durbin (*Observations on the East*), declares that he visited the spot with the settled conviction that "the legend with regard to the rock was but a fable," and that the fissures had been wrought by art to give it an apparent sanction. But he confesses, notwithstanding his skepticism on this point, "This stone made more impression upon me than any natural object claiming to attest a miracle ever did." He adds:

Had any enlightened geologist, utterly ignorant of the miracle of Moses, passed up this ravine and saw the rock as it now is, he would have declared--though the position of the stone and the present condition of the country around should have opposed any such impression--that strong and long-continued fountains of water had once poured their gurgling currents from it and over it. He could not waver in his belief for a moment, so natural and so perfect are the indications. I examined it thoroughly; and if it be a forgery, I am satisfied, for my own part, that a greater than Michael Angelo designed and executed it. I cannot differ from Shaw's opinion that "Neither art nor chance could by any means be concerned in the contrivance of these holes, which formed so many fountains." The more I gazed upon the irregular mouth-like chasms in the rock, the more I found my skepticism shaken; and at last I could not help asking myself whether it was not a very natural solution of the matter that this was indeed the rock which Moses struck, that from it the waters "gushed forth" and poured their streams down Wady Leja to Wady esh-Sheikh, and along it to Rephidim, where Israel was encamped, perishing with thirst.

Whether or not this was the particular rock that sent forth its streams when smitten by the rod of Moses (which, after all, is of little importance for us to know), there can be little doubt that from the nature of the case it was somewhere in this upper region, to which Israel afterward made a day's journey and remained encamped for nearly a year. Had not this been the case, another miracle would have been required to furnish water for the camp in Sinai. But the fountain being placed at the head of the valley in Horeb formed a source of supply to the people during the whole of their stay in the vicinity, if not after they had taken their departure.