

THE STORY OF MOSES

PART 15 – DON'T STRIKE THE ROCK

RICHARD BROWN

NUMBERS 20:1-13

NIV

¹ In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.

² Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. ³ They quarrelled with Moses and said, “If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord! ⁴ Why did you bring the Lord’s community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? ⁵ Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!”

NUMBERS 20:1-13

NIV

⁶ Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. ⁷ The Lord said to Moses, ⁸ “Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.” ⁹ So Moses took the staff from the Lord’s presence, just as he commanded him.

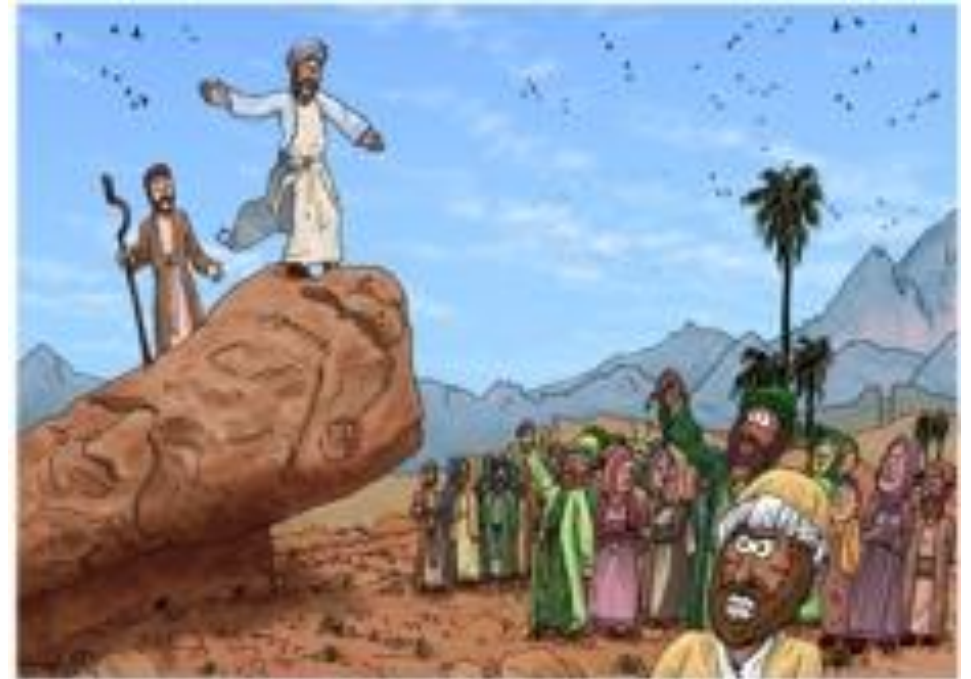
NUMBERS 20:1-13

NIV

¹⁰ He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” ¹¹ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. ¹² But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.” ¹³ These were the waters of Meribah, where the Israelites quarrelled with the Lord and where he was proved holy among them.

DON'T STRIKE THE ROCK

- Was God's punishment of Moses over the top?



EXODUS 17:1-7

ESV

¹ All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

² Therefore the people quarrelled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?”

EXODUS 17:1-7

ESV

³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

⁴ So Moses cried to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

⁵ And the Lord said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.

EXODUS 17:1-7

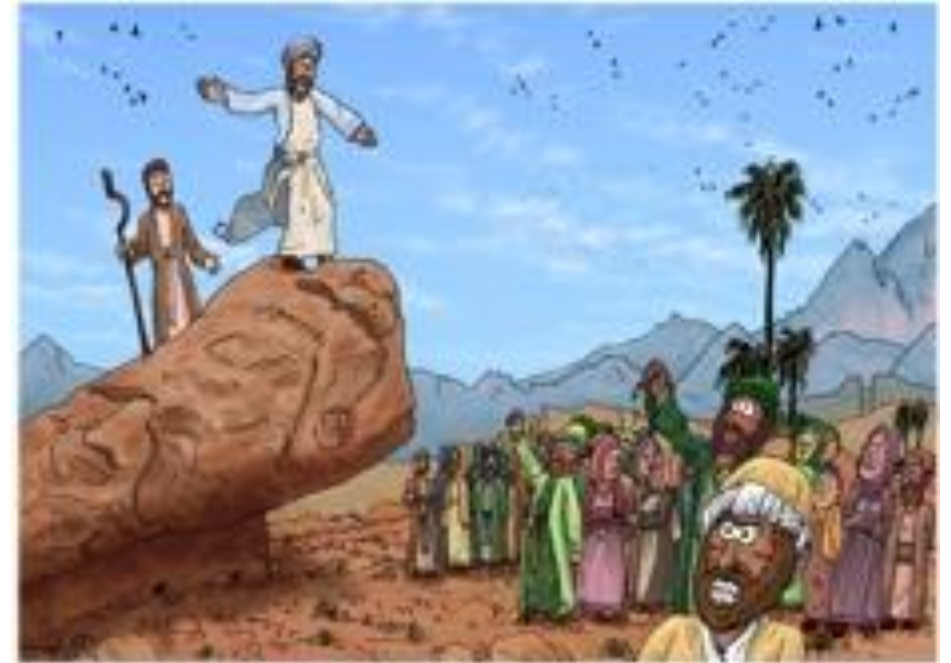
ESV

⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarrelling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

TWO SIMILAR STORIES?

- Strike the Rock
- Speak to the Rock



STRIKE THE ROCK

- The Rock is Christ

- **Psalm 18:2**, *The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*
- **Deuteronomy 32:3-4** ³ *I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!* ⁴ *He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.*

STRIKE THE ROCK

- The Rock is Christ

- **1 Corinthians 10:1-4** draws in this same imagery - ¹ *For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea.* ² *They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.* ³ *They all ate the same spiritual food* ⁴ *and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.*

STRIKE THE ROCK

- God is standing on the rock
 - Exodus 17:6 ⁶ *Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.*
 - The Hebrew term for “rock” in this passage is [ṣūr] which essentially means something like a large boulder

STRIKE THE ROCK

- Moses staff
 - Used to strike the river Nile turning it into blood
 - Used to open up the Red Sea for God's people to escape and then close it up again, destroying the entire Egyptian army that were pursuing them.
 - Moses staff speaks of God's judgement
- Moses striking the rock is symbolic of God (Christ) taking upon himself all the punishment for the sins of the people

SPEAK TO THE ROCK

- God had accompanied his people through the wilderness for 40 years, faithfully providing food and water for them, and protecting them from their enemies.
- God now tests them once more in the desert of Zin.
- The people complain to Moses and God tells Moses to *take the staff... go before all the people... and speak to the rock..., then water will flow.*

SPEAK TO THE ROCK

- The Hebrew term for “rock” in this passage is [sela'] which means a high cliff – the exalted Christ
 - **Philippians 2:9-11** ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

SPEAK TO THE ROCK

- Moses striking the rock is not the message God wanted to communicate to his people.
 - Moses had set up the tabernacle
 - A way for forgiveness and restoration had been established through the Law.
 - People's sins were being atoned for through sacrifices administered by Aaron as he intercedes on behalf of the people.

SPEAK TO THE ROCK

- Aaron's staff (the staff that budded)
 - The staff of the priest
 - The staff of intercession, not judgement
- Moses and Aaron were to stand before the exalted Christ and receive God's grace on behalf of the people by speaking to the Rock [sela'] .

SPEAK TO THE ROCK

- Romans 8:34 says that Jesus *“is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”*
- In 1 John 2:1 we read that Jesus is our *“advocate with the Father”*
- Hebrews 7:25 we learn that Jesus *“always lives to intercede” for us.”*

SPEAK TO THE ROCK

- This should have been a story of grace and forgiveness and all the glory should have gone to God.
- God's charge against Moses and Aaron: *“Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites...”*
- The rock should never have been struck a second time.

DON'T STRIKE THE ROCK

- Sin matters to God.
 - When we sin, or disobey God, or don't take God at his word, we don't believe what God says to us or about us in his word, it's like we're crucifying Christ all over again – we're striking the rock.
 - Moses paid a high price (in the here and now), but appears with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration - Immeasurable grace, love and forgiveness.
 - When we sin, we may bear the consequences of our sin in the here and now. However, this does not affect at all God's love towards us, his grace, his faithfulness, our forgiveness and position before God as righteous.

DON'T STRIKE THE ROCK

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.

DON'T STRIKE THE ROCK

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

DON'T STRIKE THE ROCK

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God (*speak to the Rock*). ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.