

## AT REPHIDIM

### *Exodus 17*

Several familiar stories—the crossing of the Red Sea, the sweetening of the bitter waters of Marah, the rest at Elim, and the giving of the quails and manna—form the background for this lesson. Each teacher will have to judge how much of the class time may safely be spent on the review of these stories without slighting the lesson for the day. The Lord's care and protection of the children of Israel is the unifying thought.

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#### Doctrinal Points

*We can overcome our temptations only by constantly looking to the Lord for help.*

*When we study the Word in order to find out how to live rightly, the Lord can show us what it means.*

*We do not really believe in the Lord if we do not trust Him.*

*It is evil deep within us which makes us subject to discouragement. Discouragement is really selfish.*

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#### Notes for Parents

On the very night on which the children of Israel celebrated the Passover feast, they started on their journey out of Egypt. The Lord showed them the way they were to go. All through their journey, which was to take a much longer time than they thought, He went before them in a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night.

We all know the story of how Pharaoh changed his mind and sent an army after them which caught up with them at the Red Sea, and how the Red Sea parted before them and, after they had crossed, closed in upon the Egyptians who tried to follow. Then the pillar led the Israelites into the wilderness.

We start on our journey from Egypt to the Holy Land when we realize that living for self and the world is slavery, and determine to obey the Lord and find our way to the kind of living which the Lord calls “blessed.” In the beginning of our journey we are eager and enthusiastic, and the way opens before us. But it is not long before we meet difficulties which discourage us, for there are many bad things in us which have to be recognized and overcome one by one. The wilderness journey, with all its trials and disappointments, is still before us.

Our chapter for today tells of two of these trials. The children of Israel are on their way to Sinai and are being led through a dry valley called Rephidim, and they are very thirsty. At the well in Samaria our Lord said, “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” The water which gushed from the rock of Horeb when Moses struck it with his rod is this same living water, truth for our daily use coming from the Word of God. You remember that the Lord is called in the Bible both the *Rock* and the *Word*.

Immediately after their thirst was satisfied, the Israelites had to fight their first battle. When we learn some new truth, it is not really ours until we have used it to overcome some evil within ourselves. But in order to win we must lift our minds above the low valley in which we are and look steadily to the Lord for help; and just as Aaron and Hur held up Moses’ hands, so all our good resolutions and principles must be used to steady and support us.

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### Primary

Spend most of the class time on the two incidents at Rephidim. Be sure the children understand that Moses, when he stood on top of the hill and held up his hands, was asking for the Lord’s help. They will remember about the crossing of the Red Sea, and they should remember the giving of the manna. In the lesson for today impress upon them the name and function of Joshua, as this is the first time he appears in the Bible story. The Lord’s constant

presence and help is the principal lesson.

You remember that when the children of Israel ate the feast of the Passover, they were dressed all ready for their journey out of Egypt. They left in great haste and traveled as fast as they could. It was fortunate that they did, because after they had gone, Pharaoh changed his mind and sent an army after them to bring them back. The army caught up with them just as they reached the shore of the Red Sea, and they thought their effort had failed.

But the Lord saved them in a wonderful way. First He caused the pillar of cloud and fire, which He had given to lead them on their journey, to move around behind the Israelites and hide them so that the Egyptians could neither see nor reach them. Then He rolled back the waters of the Red Sea so that they could cross on dry ground. And finally, when the Egyptian army tried to follow them, He made the waters come back again so that the Egyptians were all drowned.

To reach the Holy Land the people had to travel a long way.

What was the country like through which they were to travel?

How did the Lord feed them?

In our lesson for today, to what place had they come?

What were they complaining about?

How did the Lord give them water?

What enemy attacked them?

Who led the army of Israel in the battle?

What did Moses do to help?

What happened when he held up his hands?

What happened when he let them down?

When he grew tired, what did Aaron and Hur do?

What did Moses build at Rephidim after the battle?

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### Junior

This is a good opportunity to study with the Juniors a map of the wilderness journey and especially to point out Sinai in its geographical relation to Egypt and to the Holy Land. In both the incidents of our chapter the lesson to emphasize is the Lord's readiness to help us whenever we turn to Him. Call special attention to Joshua.

Look at a map and follow the course of the Israelites after they crossed the Red Sea. In chapter 14 of Exodus we read of their stop at Marah, where the Lord showed Moses how to make the bitter water sweet, and of the period of rest at Elim, “where there were twelve springs of water, and seventy palm trees.” Chapter 16 tells of the giving of quails and the miraculous bread called “manna” with which they were to be fed every day throughout their whole forty years in the wilderness.

Then comes our chapter for today. The Israelites have left the seacoast and are traveling toward Sinai. They are going through a narrow valley between mountains. In flood time these valleys carry down torrents of water, but now they are dry.

What did the people demand of Moses?

To whom did Moses turn for help?

What did the Lord tell him to do?

What happened?

What was the name of the place to which they had come?

What is the mountain called in which the rock was?

This range of mountains is called in the Bible sometimes Horeb and sometimes Sinai, although we usually think of Sinai as the particular peak from which the commandments were given.

Also at Rephidim the Israelites had to fight their first battle. The people called *Amalek* or the *Amalekites* are often mentioned as enemies of Israel. The word *Amalek* means “valley dweller.” They had a particularly troublesome method of attack. Read Deuteronomy 25:17-18 to see what it was.

Who was the leader of the fighting men of Israel?

Who went up on the hill with Moses?

What happened when Moses held up his hands to the Lord?

What happened when he let them down?

When Moses became tired, what did Aaron and Hur do?

The Amalekites were defeated, and Moses built an altar at Rephidim as a memorial of the fact that the Lord would always help the Israelites against Amalek. They had to fight them again under Gideon, and later under Saul and under David.

### Intermediate

The lesson to stress with this class is the importance of using in our daily life and our daily thinking all the truth we learn and understand in Sunday school and church. This is the only way in which we can make spiritual progress.

The Israelites were to have a long, hard journey before they reached their home in Canaan, and this means that our reformation and regeneration—our journey to our heavenly home—is a long, slow process. The whole book of Exodus, from chapter 12 on, is in its spiritual sense a description of the period of reformation in us, the period in which we recognize and try to correct our faults, one by one. In this wilderness journey the children of Israel were led by Moses, who stands for divine law, and by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, which moved before them or stood still when the Lord wished them to stop. The pillar represented the presence of the Lord with them, and Swedenborg tells us that it was actually an angelic company through whom the Lord made His presence evident.

The Lord leads us in the same way, for we know that there are angels with us all the time reminding us of the truths we have learned and prompting us to obey them. It is these angels through whom the Lord shows us the truth in the Word when we read it with a desire to learn how to live rightly. For when we read the letter of the Word, the angels who are with us are reading its internal sense.

You remember the story of the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and the drowning of the pursuing Egyptian army. This pictures our first real temptation after we make up our minds to obey the Lord. When it comes, we always think it is too strong for us, but if we trust in the Lord instead of in ourselves and go forward, we not only come through the temptation safely, but looking back we can see how weak our enemy really was.

We have also studied the stories of the first few weeks in the wilderness—how the Lord made the bitter water sweet at Marah, how He gave the people rest at Elim, and how He brought them quails when they begged for meat and supplied the manna for

their daily bread.

Now we are studying two things that happened at Rephidim, in a narrow valley between mountains on the way to Sinai. First, the people were without water. Moses, at the command of the Lord, struck the rock with his rod and the water gushed out. Water and rock are both symbols of truth, but they are truth in different forms. Rock represents the fundamental truths on which a good life is to be built. We must learn and acknowledge these. But they sometimes seem to us hard and “dry.” It is only as we try with all our might to use them—which is represented by Moses striking the rock with his rod—that we suddenly find how satisfying and helpful they can be in our daily living.

Then we are given opportunities to put our new truth into practice. We begin to see that there are faults in ourselves, wrong ideas which have been lurking within our minds because of our selfishness and worldliness. These are the Amalekites. Read Deuteronomy 25:17-18. These wrong thoughts come up in our minds when we are “tired of trying” and attack us where we are weakest. We do not overcome them at one stroke or in our own strength. We must go at them systematically. Joshua is our leader in this battle. He represents “the truth fighting,” and he is to be the leader later in the conquest of the Holy Land. Moses went up on the hill and lifted up his hands to the Lord. This means that in our battle we must always remember that it is the Lord’s law we are trying to obey and that He will help us if we ask Him.

Aaron and Hur went up with Moses and helped to hold up his hands. Aaron was Moses’ brother, the one the Lord assigned to be his spokesman to Pharaoh and to the people (Exodus 4:10-16). He represented divine law as it has come to us in the teachings of the church; and Hur, who was one of the leaders of the people (Exodus 24:14), represents the particular things our teachers and parents have been able to give us from these teachings. That is, everything we have been taught can help us to meet our inner temptations in the right way and to overcome them with the Lord’s help.



Then after the victory Moses built an altar of remembrance at Rephidim. When we say that we all have to learn some things by experience, we are usually thinking of our mistakes and failures. But victories are experience, too, and we need to remember them and especially to remember that it was the Lord who gave us the victory. The altar at Rephidim was named *Jehovah-nissi*, which means “the Lord my banner.” Moses said that “the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” Remember this whenever wrong thoughts come up in your mind; then ask the Lord’s help, and drive them out.

*Basic Correspondences*

- rock = fundamental truth
  - water = truth in a form adapted to  
our daily use
  - Moses = divine law
  - Joshua = truth fighting
  - Amalek = falsity from interior evil
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**Senior**

The Seniors are on the verge of adult life and are about to leave Egypt and begin the wilderness journey. All the stories of the wilderness wandering have, therefore, a very practical value in preparing them for the temptations they should recognize, and showing them the technique to be followed in fighting them.

We sometimes think that if we had been in the place of the Israelites—had seen the pillar of cloud and fire continually before us, had seen the Red Sea part for our passage and then close in over our enemies, had tasted the water of Marah before and after its miraculous sweetening, had eaten the quails and gathered the daily manna—we could never have complained or doubted again. Yet all these stories are symbolic pictures of our own common experience. The Word is our pillar of cloud and fire, always before us to lead us in the right way. The Lord has protected us and fed us throughout our lives. And yet, when hardship or temptation

comes, time after time we complain and falter and doubt.

In our lesson for today the children of Israel, who have been traveling southward along the Red Sea, have turned inland on their way to Sinai and are going up a narrow, dry valley, or *wadi*, called Rephidim. And again they are complaining of thirst. We recognize thirst as picturing a lack of truth. Have you ever heard a good church member—perhaps you yourself—say in the face of some impending trouble, “I just don’t know what to do; why should I have this hardship?” This is the Israelites complaining to Moses almost to the point of stoning him. And the Lord answers, “Take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.” This means: take some of the principles to which you have been assenting in church, and your knowledge of all that the Lord has done for you in the past, and apply it to your present problem. Go to the rock in Horeb—to the truth as you find it in the Word—and strike the rock with your rod. Go to the Word with the real intention of using what you find there, and you will be given the truth you need in the present—the water of life.

The Lord knows the enemy which is lurking in ambush when a person is in this state. And He knows that we shall not make any further progress until we recognize and fight this enemy. The enemy is Amalek. Amalek, whose name means “valley dweller,” was a grandson of Esau, one of those degenerate offshoots of the line of Abraham which represent in us the persistent effects of our early self-will and self-interest. As we learn from Deuteronomy 25:17-18, Amalek waited in ambush and attacked Israel from behind, falling on the weak stragglers. So when we are tired and discouraged, it often seems that all our old bad habits spring out to attack us.

Joshua, first mentioned here as the leader in the battle, was later to take the place of Moses. He represents the truth fighting. The Israelites are not yet well enough organized, however, to conquer by his leadership alone. For example, in our early battles, when we try to use the truth in argument—whether with other people or



with our own selfish feelings—we are often overcome because we are not yet experienced in its use. But the Lord shows us in this story how we can conquer even the most insidious temptations. We still have Moses, the principle of simple obedience to the commandments. This obedience brings the Lord's power into our lives. Moses went up on a hill and lifted up his hands to the Lord. We must persist in our obedience to the commandments, lift up our minds above the low state in which we are fighting, and look to the Lord for power to overcome. We should always remember that we do not really believe in the Lord if we do not trust in Him.

When Moses grew tired, he sat down on a rock, just as we must "rest in the Lord," and Aaron and Hur held up his hands. Moses, Aaron, and Hur in the story picture the three means by which the Lord sustains us through the temptations which attack us when we are tired and discouraged. Moses stands for truth directly from the Word; Aaron, the doctrines of the church; and Hur, all the things we have learned in church and Sunday school which help us to understand and apply the truth. A little later (Exodus 24:13-14) when Moses was about to go up into the mount to receive the commandments, he told the people to go to Aaron and Hur if they needed guidance while he was gone. Steadfast reliance upon the truth as it has come to us in all these three ways will enable us to hold out until the temptation is over—until the "sun" of our immediate selfish desire goes down.

And when we conquer, we should not take the credit to ourselves but should, like Moses, build an altar to the Lord to mark the place of victory so that we may remember that the Lord will always be at hand to give us strength if we look to Him.

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### Adult

The right approach to the Word and the importance of steady reliance upon the Lord in times of temptation, doubt, and discouragement are two lessons we all need. Often we think we believe in the Lord and His power to direct and save us, and we think we believe in the Word, but we do not fully use His help in the emergencies of our daily life.

The children of Israel ate the first Passover feast with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staves in their hands, and immediately started on their journey, and they reached the Red Sea before their first great impetus suffered a setback. But the setback came. It was inevitable. We cannot go through life on the strength of one good resolution. At the Red Sea the Egyptian army caught up with the Israelites. All our former habits of thought and feeling are still with us in full strength. We need to recognize this and also to feel our inability to overcome them in our own strength. It is only the Lord, present with us in the form of our guardian angels, who stands between us and destruction. The writings tell us that the pillar of cloud and fire which led the Israelites throughout their journey and which stood behind them through the night at the Red Sea to hide them from the pursuing enemy, was actually a company of angels with the Lord in their midst. We read in the twenty-seventh Psalm: "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion." And before we can really be free of our bondage to the world, we must have the further experience of seeing our way opened before us by the Lord and must be made to acknowledge the powerlessness of our enemies to follow us if we go forward. This is our "crossing of the Red Sea."

We have studied the stories of the sweetening of the bitter water at Marah, the welcome period of rest at Elim, and the giving of the quails and manna. These early experiences in the wilderness picture the first benefits we receive from the Lord in our efforts to reform our lives. For we recall that the whole wilderness journey describes the period of "reformation" through which we must pass before actual regeneration begins.

"Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness." The hunger of the Israelites pictures our realization that of ourselves we have no goodness. The story of the giving of the manna is the promise that the Lord will give us of His goodness day by day to strengthen us on our way. Thirst represents our sense of need for truth. How often we say, "I wish I knew"! After the

manna comes the giving of water from the rock of Horeb.

Moses was commanded: “Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. 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.” This is our pattern for finding the truth which we need for our daily living—a pattern to follow every time we say, “I wish I knew.” Here is how we may understand it: Moses as our leader represents our acknowledgment that we must obey the divine law. The rock in Horeb is the Word as the basis of our faith. The Lord always stands before us on the rock in Horeb. We are to go to the Word for the truth we need. But there are other specific directions. We are to take with us some of the elders of Israel—the principles given us in our doctrines—and the rod or power of the Lord as we have experienced it in past crises. We are to take the rod in our hand and smite the rock—that is, to go to the Word with the conviction that we shall be given the power to understand and use its truth. The Word does not yield the water of life to those who read it as a product of men or to those who go to it to find confirmation for their own ideas. This is one of the lessons we must learn early in our journey.

Our chapter today also contains another lesson which we all need many times in our lives. So far in the story there has been little for Israel to do but to follow the pillar of cloud and fire. Even when they crossed the Red Sea, the Israelites had only to go steadily forward. The Lord opened the way for them and destroyed their enemies. And in the experiences which followed, they had only to ask and the Lord provided their needs. But now they are permitted to encounter an enemy whom they have to fight. As soon as we have gone a little way on our journey toward the promised land and have gained a little confidence and strength, this strength must be tried.

The Israelites were at Rephidim, passing through a narrow valley leading inland, when they were attacked by the Amalekites.

*Amalek* means “valley dweller.” Amalek was a grandson of Esau. He pictures an evil in the will, or a “low” state of the will. In Deuteronomy 25:17-18 we learn that it was the strategy of the Amalekites to spring out from ambush on the rear of the line of their enemy and attack the stragglers and the weary. How often when we are physically or mentally tired, we find it harder to resist the temptation to indulge in doubt and discouragement, and in hasty judgment or speech! Our will power is at a low point, and our individual weaknesses manifest themselves suddenly and are hard to control. It is these times which show us most clearly what our own real nature is—what we would be without the Lord’s protection and help. We need this revelation.

Moses offered to take the rod of God in his hand and go up to the top of the nearest hill. This is a picture of the immediate attempt we should make to lift our thoughts to the Lord and, remembering His help in the past, to look confidently to Him for strength. Moses—symbol of the law as we find it in the Word—is our first reliance. As long as Moses’ hands were lifted up, Israel prevailed.

But Moses’ hands grew weary. We grow tired of fighting with only the stern “Thou shalt not” to support us. Swedenborg tells us that in this story Moses, Aaron, and Hur represent divine truth in three stages of its mediation to us. Moses represents truth received immediately from the Lord; that is, our knowledge of the Word itself. Aaron, who was presently to be appointed high priest and who had been Moses’ spokesman from the beginning, represents the truth from the Word as it is explained in the doctrines of the church. Hur, who was one of the leaders of the people, represents this mediate truth again mediated, as, perhaps, it comes to us from our pastors and teachers and in our own meditation and experience. Aaron and Hur held up Moses’ hands. When we are tired and discouraged and tempted to give in to our weaknesses, we should recall all that we have learned of the Lord’s guidance and saving power from the Word, from the church, and from our own thought and experience. Moses sat on a rock and

Aaron and Hur held up his hands until the sun went down and Israel prevailed. We must rest on our faith in the Lord, our Rock, and make use of all we know of His love for us and His power to save and strengthen us, until the sun of our self-love goes down and we are victorious.

Then we should give thanks to the Lord for His help. Moses built an altar of remembrance and called it *Jehovah-nissi*, which means “the Lord my banner.” We have added one more experience to strengthen us for the next conflict.

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### From the Writings of Swedenborg

*Arcana Coelestia*, nn. 8554-8555: “In the preceding chapter, in the internal sense, the third temptation was treated of—that there was a lack of good. This having been given them, in the internal sense in this chapter the fourth temptation is treated of—that there was a lack of truth. This temptation is signified by ‘the murmuring of the sons of Israel because they had no water,’ and therefore the truth of faith was given them by the Lord, which is signified by ‘the water out of the rock of Horeb.’ Then follows the combat of the falsity that is from evil against the truth and good of faith, which combat is represented by the fighting of Amalek against Israel. That they who are in the truth and good of faith conquer when they look upward to the Lord, and that they yield when they look downward, is represented by the sons of Israel conquering so long as Moses kept his hands raised, and by their yielding when he let them down.”

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### Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. How did the Israelites cross the Red Sea? *miraculous parting*
- J. How were they led in their journey? *pillar of cloud/fire*
- J. To what place have they come in our lesson for today? *Rephidim*
- P. What are they complaining about? *no water*
- P. What does the Lord tell Moses to do? *strike rock*
- P. What happened when Moses struck the rock? *water came out*
- J. After this what enemy attacked Israel? *Amalek*
- P. What leader was appointed for the battle? *Joshua*
- P. What did Moses do? *went up on hill*
- J. Who went up on the hill with him? *Aaron and Hur*

- P. How was Moses able to control the course of the battle? *holding hands up*
- P. How was he helped when he grew tired? *Aaron, Hur, rock*
- J. What did he build as a memorial of the victory? *altar*
- I. What is represented by getting water out of the rock? *making effort to use "dry" truths*
- I. What is pictured by Amalek? *discouragement, based on hereditary self-will*
- S. What is pictured by the Israelites' being victorious as long as Moses held up his hands? *lifting thoughts to God, remembering His past help*
- S. What do (1) Aaron, and (2) Hur, represent in this story?
  - (1) *doctrines of church*
  - (2) *thoughts learned in Sunday school, church, from parents, etc.*