

Lenten Devotional 2020

Monday, March 16, 2020
Day 17, Exodus 17

Is the Lord Among Us?

And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7)

That's the question isn't it? Is the Lord among us or not? Here is a new fledgling people trying to understand the rules of engagement with this newly-present-to-them God. And, we can see the structure. Moses represents this God to the people. So, when crisis strikes they go to him vehemently and ask what is going on? What is the Lord's intentions for his people? Is he going to fulfil his promise and bring them safely to a good land of their own or is he going to let them die of thirst in the desert?

Perhaps today, as the world struggles with the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a salient question for us all; is the Lord with us or not? In which case, the answer given is particularly assuring. In the NASB verse 5 says, "Pass before the people..." This phrasing recalls the way the Lord himself will pass before Moses later in the book. This clues us into the fact that the Lord is with Moses in a special way, so he is with the people in a special way. We then have two events that displays this.

First, we have the immediate issue of the need for water. Moses is directed to take his staff and strike the rock (the specific one to which God has directed him), the water will come out of it, and the people will drink. The assumption is that Moses did this and it results in the way promised. Then we have this battle with Amalek (another nomadic tribe). Joshua is sent with men to fight, but it is ultimately when Moses holds his staff aloft, "Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands" (v. 9). As long as the staff was up the battle was for Israel.

The staff is the answer to the question of whether or not God is among us. In Genesis the trees of the Eden garden are key, many of God's self revelations are near trees, and then in Exodus we have the bush that burned (fire is another image for God). The staff of Moses, consecrated by God, is a portable tree—it's wood. The staff is the symbol of God's presence among the Israelites. It was the instrument to call down the plagues, to part the sea, to drown Egypt, and now to provide water and fight for Israel.

With the current crisis we may ask, particularly in the face of death, if the Lord is with us. The answer is in the cross of Christ. The cross stands in our midst reminding us, even in the face of adversity, that the Lord is indeed with us and he is for us. We need to use wisdom and precautions, but we need not fear he is not with us. This is the theme, particularly, of the book of Revelation, "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and it's seven seals.' **Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne**, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." (Revelation 5:5-6).

Prayer

Tree of Life, thank you for being among your creation in good times and in times of trouble. As we wrestle with what is going on around us, we pray that you would direct our eyes to your cross. We also pray that we would be like Moses to our neighbours, so they will know that God is with us. May our presence be peace to them in a fearful place and time. Amen.