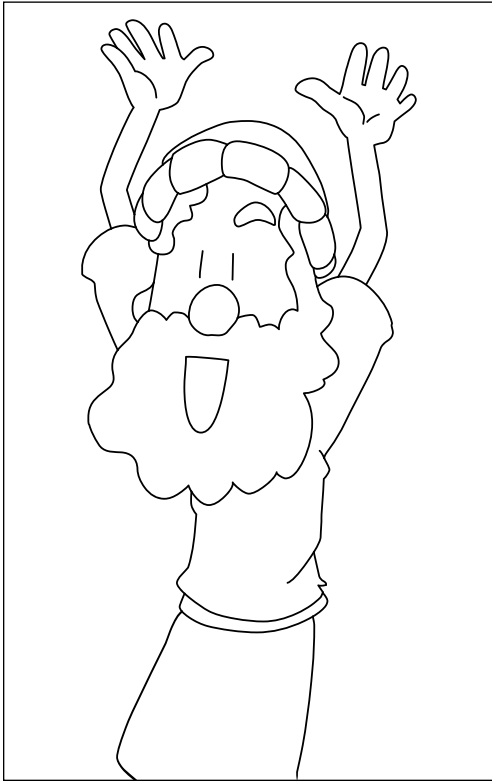


Water from the rock



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Exodus 17:1-7

The Israelites left the desert and moved from one place to another each time the LORD ordered them to. Once they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for them to drink. The people started complaining to Moses, “Give us some water!” Moses replied, “Why are you complaining to me and trying to put the LORD to the test?” But the people were thirsty and kept on complaining, “Moses, did you bring us out of Egypt just to let us and our families and our animals die of thirst?” Then Moses prayed to the LORD, “What am I going to do with these people? They are about to stone me to death!”

The LORD answered, “Take some of the leaders with you and go ahead of the rest of the people. Also take along the walking stick you used to strike the River Nile, and when you get to the rock at Mount Sinai, I will be there with you. Strike the rock with the stick, and water will pour out for the people to drink.” Moses did this while the leaders watched. The people had complained and tested the LORD by asking, “Is the LORD really with us?” So Moses named that place Massah, which means “testing” and Meribah, which means “complaining”.

Commentary

The Israelites had escaped from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, but this was only the beginning of their new life as a free people. There were many hardships ahead as they crossed the desert towards the mountain where God had first appeared to Moses. The desert was a hostile place with little food or water, and Moses was leading a very large number of people. Just as they had had to trust God for their rescue, they also needed to trust him to provide for their needs, and, most importantly, for water to drink.

Once again the people are quick to complain. No wonder Moses is angry, and he despairs of them in his prayer to God. It is all down to Moses' obedience, using the staff to strike the rock, that water is found. Will the Israelites learn from this and be more faithful in the future? Clearly Moses isn't sure that they will. He gives the rocks special names that will remind the Israelites not to give up on God quite so quickly in the future. It's not just starting out with God that matters, but staying on track through difficult times. This was proving a real challenge for God's people.

Questions

- ▶ Have you ever been tempted to give up on a difficult task? What kept you going?
- ▶ How quick are you to criticize or complain in a crisis?
- ▶ Moses had learned how to talk to God about everything that happened. How easy do you find this?
- ▶ How can we learn to trust God better?



Visual aid

Fill a glass with water to the halfway point. Talk together about whether you are an optimistic 'glass half-full' or a pessimistic 'glass half-empty' sort of person. What can we learn from both attitudes?



Activity idea

Finding water in the desert is a matter of life and death. Without water, living things cannot survive very long, so it's not surprising that water is often used in the Bible as a picture of God's generous love for us. As a reminder of God's gift of life, plant some herb or bean seeds on a cotton ball and keep them well watered. Watch them grow over the next weeks, and, each time you see them, let them remind you that only as God waters us can we grow to become the best we can be.



Prayer idea

Spend some time thanking God for water and all the many things that it helps us to do. Perhaps you could have some glasses of water available and each member of the family can take a sip each time anyone thinks up a new thank-you prayer for what water can do for us. Take a moment to remember the many people in the world who do not have access to clean water.

Key verse

Why are you complaining... and trying to put the Lord to the test? (Exodus 17:2).

New Testament story link

John 7:37-39: Jesus says he will give us life-giving water that will flow from deep inside us.



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