

Come to Understanding

**They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24**

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Speak to the Rock

It was a time of great celebration. First the children of Israel were miraculously freed from Egypt, where they had been slaves for more than four hundred years. Then they escaped from the approaching Egyptian army by crossing the parted Red Sea. They had been delivered by Yahweh. The eighty year old Moses led the singing:

- 1 Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto Yahweh, and spoke, saying, I will sing to Yahweh, for he has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider has he thrown into the sea.
- 2 Yah *is* my strength and song, and he has become my salvation: he *is* my God, and I will prepare him a habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. -Exodus 15

Then Miriam, who was even older than Moses, led the women in singing and dancing over the victory that Yahweh had won for them:

- 20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dances.
- 21 And Miriam answered them, Sing you to Yahweh, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider has he thrown into the sea. -Exodus 15

Ironically, both Moses and Miriam have names that concern water. The Egyptian princess who had adopted Moses as her son gave him his name, which means "drawn," because she drew him out of the water:

- 10 And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water. -Exodus 2

Miriam's name, which means "rebellion," is formed from the Hebrew words "mar," which means "bitter," and "yam," which means "sea." Therefore, her name also means "bitter sea" (see *Strong's Concordance*).

Ironically, it was only three days after the great celebration led by Moses and Miriam, whose names are both connected with water, when the children of Israel found themselves without water:

- 22 So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. -Exodus 15

They continued searching until they finally came to a place of bitter water, which they named Marah:

- 23 And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they *were* bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. -Exodus 15

The water was unfit to drink. Thinking they were in a hopeless situation, the children of Israel murmured against Moses:

- 24 And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? -Exodus 15

Believing in the saving power of Yahweh, Moses cried out to Him. Yahweh showed him a tree, which he cast into the waters. The bitter waters were made sweet!

- 25 And he cried unto Yahweh; and Yahweh showed him a tree, *which* when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, -Exodus 15

Yahweh told Moses and the other children of Israel that He had the power to heal them. All they had to do was to diligently listen to Him and obey Him:

- 26 And said, If you will diligently listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, and will do that which is right in his sight, and will give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon you, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I *am* Yahweh that heals you. -Exodus 15

Yahweh continued to provide Israel with water:

- 27 And they came to Elim, where *were* twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters. -Exodus 15

Even though Israel saw Yahweh's miraculous provision for them, each time they looked at their difficult circumstances, they became overwhelmed with fear and doubt. As they passed through the Wilderness of Sin, they again found themselves without water. Moses again cried out to Yahweh:

- 4 And Moses cried unto Yahweh, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they are almost ready to stone me. -Exodus 17

Yahweh answered Moses' cry. He told him to take his rod and strike the rock and water would flow forth from it.

**So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8**

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Moses obeyed, not in front of the whole congregation, but “in the sight of the elders of Israel:”

5 And Yahweh said to Moses, Go on before the people, and take with you of the elders of Israel; and your rod, with which you smote the river, take in your hand, and go.

6 Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. -Exodus 17

That place was called “Massah,” which means temptation (from a word meaning to test or to try), and “Meribah,” which means strife or contention. While Moses acted in obedient faith, the children of Israel showed that they continued in their unbelief:

7 And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted Yahweh, saying, Is Yahweh among us, or not? -Exodus 17

As the journey went on, Yahweh continued to test their faith. He wanted them to trust Him and to obey Him. After forty years of journey through trials and temptations, Yahweh brought Israel to the Desert of Zin. They arrived in the first month, which was the month in which to remember the first Passover, during which Yahweh had miraculously freed Israel from Egypt. It was also the place where Miriam died (see Numbers 20:1).

Again finding no water, the children of Israel complained to Moses and Aaron about their condition:

2 And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.

3 And the people strove with Moses, and spoke, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before Yahweh! -Numbers 20

Moses and Aaron sought Yahweh for another miracle:

6 And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of Yahweh appeared to them. -Numbers 20

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Institute for Biblical and Historical Studies
P.O. Box 12, 114 East Main Street
Addison, Michigan 49220 U.S.A.
biblical@ibiblical.org

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Yahweh had miraculously provided water when Moses acted by faith according to His word. He had told him to use a tree to heal the bitter waters. Then He told him to smite a rock with his rod in front of the elders. This time, however, Yahweh told Moses that here was nothing for him to do except stand among the entire congregation, hold his rod, and speak to the rock. The water would come forth:

7 And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying,

8 Take the rod, and gather you the assembly together, you, and Aaron your brother, and speak you to the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and you shall bring forth to them water out of the rock: so you shall give the congregation and their beasts drink. -Numbers 20

Moses took the rod, as he was told:

9 And Moses took the rod from before Yahweh, as he commanded him. -Numbers 20

After he assembled the congregation, he called them “rebels” and said “must we fetch you water out of this rock?”

10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said to them, Hear now, you rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? -Numbers 20

Then, in what must have been a magnificent performance in front of the whole congregation, Moses lifted up his hand with his rod in it. Then he struck the rock, not once but twice, and the water gushed out!

11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts *also*. -Numbers 20

By striking the rock, rather than speaking to it, Moses demonstrated his unbelief and, failing the test, he took the glory that belonged to Yahweh. Therefore, he would not be allowed to lead Israel into the Promised Land:

12 And Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, Because you believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. -Numbers 20

Moses had apparently forgotten the encouragement that he had given to the children of Israel as they fearfully stood between the Red Sea and the approaching Egyptian army:

14 Yahweh shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace. -Exodus 14

As the frightening armies of the Moabites and Ammonites approached Judah, the prophet told King Jehoshaphat:

15b Thus says Yahweh to you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle *is* not yours, but God's. -2 Chronicles 20

Then the king told the people of Judah:

20b Believe in Yahweh your God, so shall you be established; believe his prophets, so shall you prosper. -2 Chronicles 20

Can we likewise believe in Yahweh, hold our peace, and, at His command, simply “speak to the rock?”