

God, Where Are You? By Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 19050925

Exodus 17:1-7 and Matthew 21:23-32

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Moses and the people of Israel struggled through the desert. They got to a place called Rephidim. They were thirsty, and there was no water.

Moses was close to God, but that can be a curse and a blessing. Moses was cursed by being a leader. It was God who called him to do this job of leading the Hebrews out of Egypt. God worked all those miracles to get Pharaoh to release the slaves. God parted the waters of the Reed Sea to save them all from Pharaoh's army. Now, here they were with no water, and the people started complaining.

If you put yourself inside Moses' mind, you might imagine how he felt. Thousands of former slaves depend upon your leadership. They have followed you out of Egypt, pursued by Pharaoh's army, through the water, and now through the desert. You have led the people by following what?— a cloud by day and a fiery pillar by night? You have gotten them eating what?—white stuff found on the ground every morning? And it has all been God's idea!

The people have complained a lot, first at Pihahiroth with the enemy horses and chariots camped out in view,¹ then at Marah because the water was bitter,² then in the Wilderness of Sin where they grew hungry,³ and now they expect you to find them water here at Rephidim, which Moses called "Massah".⁴

Moses probably thought, "Okay God, do something."

Nothing!

"God, I need another miracle from you to satisfy them."

Nothing!

"God, where are you?"

I'll bet you have said that a time or two. You have been in a tight situation: "God, where are you?"

This is a question both of doubt and of faith. It implies a belief that God is somewhere, "God, *where* are you?"

It's a desire to find and understand God, "God, where *are* you?"

It's a struggle to discern God's presence. "God, where *are you*?"

Moses, less frustrated than scared, said, LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."⁵ These former slaves were still slaves at heart, and they depended upon Moses' leadership.

It is a common problem to blame the leader. Too often, we expect someone else to solve our problems for us instead of taking the initiative to search for solutions. It is too easy to blame the leader. We are not slaves and we do not have to be dependent upon others' leadership.

Once again, God gave Moses a trick, a "miracle," to show God's power and that God was with Moses in his leading. He told Moses to strike a rock with his stick. This is the same stick

¹Exodus 14:1

²Exodus 15:23

³Exodus 16:1

⁴Exodus 17:7

⁵Exodus 17:4

with which Moses struck the Nile a few months back, and made the river undrinkable.

With that same stick, Moses struck a rock, and water gushed out: beautiful, clear water that the people could drink and quench their thirst.

Now, I understand that this may not be such a great miracle after all. Supposedly, even today there are desert dwellers who know how to strike limestone rocks in the right way to crack open the pockets within them containing stored rainwater.

You may be wondering what I'm doing, questioning God's miracles. It is not that I doubt miracles. I question how they might come about. I question whether or not they break God's own laws about the physics of the universe. Most of all, I question why miracles are so important to some people.

I have had inquiries from people about our church. Question: "Do you preach the Bible?"

Answer: "Yes. Every sermon is Biblically based."

Question: "Do you believe the miracles?"

Answer (with a question, much as Jesus questioned): "What miracles?"

Question: "Do you teach all the miracles of the Bible—the miracles of Moses, the miracles of Jesus, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection?"

Answer: "Our faith is not based on miracles. Our faith is based on God. It is based on the belief that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, and that we accept Jesus as our savior."

Believing in miracles is not a substitute for faith in God. What is going on in this story by Massah is an example of mistrust and rebellion. How many miracles will it take to get the people to believe in God? How often will the Israelites test God? That is what "massah" means in Hebrew: *to test*.

There is nothing more that God can do to get us to believe in God. Count the things God has done for the Israelites: no less than ten plagues, including a red Nile, frogs, flies, gnats, boils, and the death of firstborn Egyptian children, the parting of the Reed Sea, the pillars of cloud and fire, turning bitter water into drinking water, manna and quail to feed their hunger, and still, they need a miracle to quench their thirst and prove that God is God.

It didn't work.

It did not work! In a few chapters, while Moses was up on the mountain receiving the covenant from God, the people got restless during his absence, and made a golden calf and began worshipping it! The miracles did not make faith.

Do we test God? Do we dare God to prove God's existence through miracles? "God, you've got to save aunt Mable. I can't bear to lose her. Cure this disease in her." It is as though we refuse to believe in God's existence unless God performs a miracle!

Will it work? Will that get us to believe in God, or will the belief hold only until the next difficulty that upsets our prescription for how God ought to treat us?

Don't wait for a miracle. Believe in God now. Our existence as Christians is founded on faith: there is a God, and that God is a God of love.

Our task is to ask, "God, where are you?" meaning, "God, I know you are there, help me to discern your purposes and your will."

"God, I know you are there. Help me to be faithful to you. Remind me that I am always in your loving hands." With that faith that God is, we will find God at work in our communities, at our jobs, in our homes, and in our hearts. We will even find God at work not in the destruction of hurricanes, but in the compassion, service, healing, rebuilding and kindness following the hurricanes.