

# Tap, Tap

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*If you listen to some people, you might get the idea that God is very predictable—that is, He will always act in exactly the same way every time a similar situation comes up. But our God's ways aren't always so easy to anticipate because we don't understand the 'why' behind His actions.*

*And sometimes we see this unpredictability in the Bible. The problem is that sometimes we don't recognize that we're reading two different stories. After all, the situations appear almost the same!*

*But today's story—I mean, **stories**—are different. We know the stories are different because Aaron's sister Miriam is alive during the first one but has died before the second one happens. These two stories come from Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13.*

When you're stuck in the desert, one thing is certain:

You're going to get thirsty. Very often!  
So it should come as no surprise that, after they escaped from Egypt,  
God needed to provide water for the Israelites more than once.

Many days after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea  
and God had done miracles to give them food and water,  
they came to a place called Rephidim, near Mount Sinai.  
There was no water at Rephidim at all!  
And the people demanded that Moses give them water to drink.

Moses wasn't scared. Instead, he told them to be quiet!  
Hadn't the Lord provided water and food for them before?  
Did they want to make Him angry?

But the people just kept on complaining. "We're going to die out here!" they said.  
And they picked up rocks, intending to stone Moses.  
So Moses begged the Lord for help.  
The Lord told him to take his shepherd's staff, the one he used to part the Red Sea,  
and take the Israelite leaders to a big rock at the foot of Mount Sinai.  
"Tap the rock with your staff," God told him,  
"and water will come rushing out."  
There will be more than enough for the people to drink."

So Moses did as God said and the people had all the water they needed.  
But Moses renamed the place Meribah and Massah,  
words that meant *arguing* and *testing*,  
because the Israelites argued with Moses and tested God there.

You would think that after God provided for them time after time,  
the Israelites would realize that He intended to take care of them.  
But it seems that they never got the message. They continued to disobey Him  
and then complain when that disobedience got them in trouble.

And while God patiently continued to take care of them,  
Moses's patience finally ran out.

After the Israelites finally reached the Promised Land  
and refused to go in because they were afraid,  
God told them that they would spend the next 40 years in the wilderness.  
During their time there, they came to a place called Kadesh.  
While they were there, Aaron's sister Miriam died.  
She was the one who led their celebrations, so this was a great loss.

And to make matters worse, there was no water there either.  
So once again, the Israelites rebelled against Moses and Aaron.  
They blamed Moses for all their troubles,  
and said they wished they had died in Egypt,  
and they complained about everything else they could think of as well.

Moses and Aaron went away from the people so they could talk to God.  
And God told Moses to get his staff again and go to a nearby rock.  
"Call all the people together and speak to the rock.  
Command it to pour out water for them and it will,  
enough for them and all their livestock."

But Moses had had enough of the Israelites and their griping!  
He stepped up in front of the people and said to them,  
"Listen to me, you rebellious people!  
Do we have to bring you water from the rocks again?"  
Then he didn't even speak to the rock.  
No, he was so angry that he smacked it twice with his staff.

God sent the water anyway though,  
more than enough for all the people and their animals.  
But he was angry with Moses. "You didn't trust Me enough  
to let the people of Israel see My power and holiness,  
so I will not let you lead them into the Promised Land."

And this place also became known as Meribah,  
because it was where the people of Israel argued with God yet again.

So why was God so hard on Moses the second time around?  
What was so different about God the second time?

God wasn't any different at all.  
Rather, it was **Moses** who was different the second time.  
In each case, God told Moses what to do.  
And each time, God gave them water.  
The first time, Moses came to God humbly, asking for God's help.  
It appears that Moses might have even been afraid *for the people*—  
afraid that they would bring God's anger down on themselves.  
God told him to strike the rock once and he would send water.

But the second time Moses was very different.

He was clearly still very angry  
that the people had refused to enter the Promised Land,  
very angry that he had to deal with yet another rebellion,  
and it shows in his response.

This time God didn't tell him to hit the rock;  
no, He told him to *just speak to it*.

A mere physical demonstration would mean nothing to the people this time;  
He had shown His power so many times already,  
what more did they need to see?

This time he would show His power in mere words,  
show them that He only needed to speak for the earth to move.

But Moses ruined that. His actions made it appear as if  
poor God needed Moses's help to accomplish His miracles.  
Moses didn't merely tap the rock either; he hit it *twice*,  
showing his anger more than God's power.

That's why God refused to let Moses lead the people into the Promised Land.  
He needed someone who would obey Him,  
not let his emotions take over when it was critical  
that God's leadership be seen.

One of the Old Testament prophets once said, "Obedience is better than sacrifice."  
So perhaps when we are confused by God's actions,  
when He appears to be acting inconsistently,  
perhaps we should look a bit closer at our own behavior.

*If we don't, the results might be more predictable than we'd like.*