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Old Testament: Exodus 17:1-7

Context: Israel is newly freed from Egypt, still learning how to trust God in the wilderness, when a basic need (water) turns into a crisis that reveals both their fear and Gods patience.

WATER FROM THE ROCK

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

The people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?”

But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?”

So, Moses cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do for this people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

The Lord said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.”

Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

OVERVIEW

Exodus 17:1-7 is the story of Israel’s water crisis at Rephidim. The people quarrel with Moses, accuse him of bringing them out to die, and essentially put God on trial: "Is the Lord among us or not?" God responds not with punishment, but provision: Moses strikes the rock at Horeb, and water flows. The place is named Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarreling) to memorialize the spiritual lesson, not the miracle itself.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

What comes right before (Exodus 15:22-16:36, especially 16)

- **Bitter water at Marah (15:22-27):** Another water test. God makes bitter water sweet and calls Israel to listen and trust.
- **Manna and quail (16):** A food test. God provides daily bread, teaches Sabbath rhythms, and confronts hoarding and anxiety.
- **So by Exodus 17, this is a pattern:** need arises -> fear rises -> complaint rises -> God provides -> lesson is offered.

What happens right after (Exodus 17:8-16)

- **Battle with Amalek:** Immediately after God provides water, Israel faces conflict. Moses hands raised on the hill becomes a picture of dependence, communal support, and Gods deliverance in struggle.
- **This matters because it shows:** even after provision, life is not instantly easy. Trust has to be practiced again.



Broader narrative and theological context of Exodus

Exodus is not just "escape from Egypt." It is formation into a people:

- God liberates, then disciplines, teaches, and shapes a covenant community.
- The wilderness is the in-between place: freed from slavery, not yet living in the promised land.
- A major theme is: **Will Israel live as if God is present and trustworthy, or as if fear and scarcity are the truest reality?**
- Exodus 17 shows how quickly a rescued people can revert to survival-mode thinking.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Wilderness travel realities:** Water sources were uneven and seasonal. A few days without reliable water is a genuine emergency. Their fear is understandable, even if their response is spiritually corrosive.
- **Leadership strain and social stability:** A thirsty crowd becomes a volatile crowd. Moses says they are close to stoning him. In ancient settings, a leader who cannot provide security often becomes the scapegoat.
- **Ancient Near Eastern expectations:** In many cultures, gods were tied to land and fertility. In the wilderness (away from Egypt, away from settled life), Israel's question "Is the Lord among us?" is also a question about whether their God can operate outside familiar places.
- **Political undertone:** The people treat Moses like a failed administrator and treat God like a suspect ally. In modern terms, it is the politics of panic: when fear is high, accusations get loud, and trust collapses fast.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Scholars date the writing and shaping of Exodus through stages, but the story is set in Israel's early identity formation:

- **Story world timeframe:** after the Exodus from Egypt, during wilderness wandering, before Sinai covenant details are fully completed in the narrative flow.
- **Common proposed historical windows for an Exodus tradition:** often placed by scholars somewhere in the **Late Bronze Age** (roughly 1500-1200 BC), though views vary widely.
- **Text development:** many scholars see Exodus as drawing on older traditions later compiled and edited over centuries (often associated with Israel's monarchy and/or exilic/post-exilic periods). The exact dating is debated, but the theological purpose is clear: to teach trust and covenant identity.

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Original language and dating

- **Language:** Biblical Hebrew (with some later editorial shaping typical of the Pentateuch).
- **Key place-names and wordplay:** Names often carry interpretive meaning, not just geography.

Major stages of English translation (very brief)

- Early English roots: Wycliffe (late 1300s, from Latin).
- Tyndale (1500s, from Hebrew and Greek, hugely influential).
- King James Version (1611) shaped English Bible language for centuries.



- Modern era: a wide range from more word-for-word (NASB, ESV) to more thought-for-thought (NIV) to more dynamic paraphrase (NLT).

Theologically significant translation choices in Exodus 17:1-7

- **"Quarreled" / "contended"**: Not just complaining. It is a legal-flavored word: arguing a case, pressing charges.
- **"Test"**: Can mean test, try, prove. The people are not asking honest questions; they are demanding proof on their terms.
- **"Is the Lord among us or not?"** This is the theological center. It is not only about water, it is about presence.
- **"Strike" the rock**: Some translations emphasize "strike"; others soften. The force of the action can echo judgment imagery, but here it becomes provision.
- **"The Lord stood before you" (17:6)**: God's presence is pictured as near and active, not distant. Some readers miss how bold this is: God meets them at the place of accusation.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

When people feel threatened:

- They compress life into one urgent need.
- They look for a human to blame.
- They turn a relationship into a courtroom.
- They demand a guarantee, not a God.

Modern-day parallels (especially in a place like Grant County)

- **Economic pressure**: When money is tight, jobs feel unstable, or bills stack up, a community can start sounding like Rephidim: "We are going to die out here." People become reactive, and trust (in leaders, institutions, even neighbors) collapses.
- **Healthcare and addiction realities**: Families carrying chronic stress often reach the point where patience is gone. Fear talks louder than wisdom.
- **Church life**: A church can "quarrel" with its leaders or with God in subtle ways: "Why are we shrinking?" "Why are young people leaving?" "Why is giving down?" The question underneath can become: "Is God among us or not?"
- **The key metaphor**: God brings water from a rock, meaning provision can come from the place you least expect and cannot control. The rock is the symbol of "nothing is there." God makes it a source.

So, the spiritual invitation is not "Stop having needs." It is: Do not let need turn you into someone who only knows how to accuse.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

- **Name the real need without turning it into a weapon.** It is okay to say, "We are scared. We need help." It is not okay to turn fear into contempt.
- **Watch the shift from prayer to prosecution.** There is a difference between asking God for help and putting God on trial.
- **Refuse scapegoating.** In crisis, communities often pick a Moses to stone. Christians should be the people who slow the mob down.



- **Practice memory.** Exodus keeps naming places so people remember what they learned. We need spiritual memory too: journals, testimonies, "God showed up before" stories.
- **Look for the "rock places."** The places that seem most closed, hard, and hopeless are often where God teaches dependence, creativity, and community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *What is the difference between an honest lament to God and "testing" God?*
2. *Why do you think the people forget Marah and manna so quickly?*
3. *Who gets blamed first when fear hits a community? Why?*
4. *What does "Is the Lord among us or not?" look like in modern life without anyone saying the words?*
5. *Why do you think God responds with provision instead of punishment here?*
6. *What would it look like for our church/community to respond to scarcity with faith instead of accusation?*
7. *If Massah and Meribah are warning signs, what are the warning signs in us?*





Gospel: John 4:27-38

Context: John 4:27-38 comes right after Jesus speaks with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, and it captures the disciples' surprise, the woman's sudden witness to her town, and Jesus teaching that God's work is already "ripe" for harvest.

JESUS AND THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something."

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

So, the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.

"The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

OVERVIEW

This passage is a hinge moment. The disciples return and are confused that Jesus is talking with a Samaritan woman. Meanwhile, she leaves her water jar, runs back, and becomes an unlikely "first evangelist" to her community. Jesus then reframes everything the disciples think they know about "purpose" and "success": his nourishment is doing the Father's will, and the harvest of people ready to receive good news is already happening right in front of them. He pushes them from a slow, cautious mindset ("four months more...") into a present-tense readiness ("look... the fields are ripe").

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately before (John 4:1-26)

- Jesus intentionally travels through Samaria (already a provocative choice).
- At the well, he asks a Samaritan woman for water, crossing multiple social boundaries (ethnic/religious hostility, gender norms, moral stigma).
- He speaks of "living water," exposes her life truthfully without humiliation, and reveals himself as Messiah ("I am he").
- The conversation models truth + mercy: Jesus neither flatters nor shames; he invites.



Our passage (John 4:27-38)

- The disciples are shocked but silent: “No one asked, ‘What do you want?’ or ‘Why are you talking with her?’” Their silence shows discomfort and social caution.
- The woman “left her water jar” and ran to the town. That detail matters: she drops the tool of her old daily need because a deeper need has been met. Symbolically, she leaves the “old errand” to join a new mission.
- Jesus teaches:
 - “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” He is not driven by appetite, reputation, or schedule.
 - “Open your eyes... the fields are ripe for harvest.” The disciples are thinking later; Jesus says now.
 - Sower and reaper rejoice together: spiritual work is shared across time and people. Some do hidden planting; others get to see results.

Immediately after (John 4:39-42)

- Many Samaritans believe because of the woman’s testimony, then believe more deeply because they hear Jesus themselves.
- They call him “Savior of the world” (big language in a surprising place).
- The story shows that “outsiders” can become the first insiders to the good news.

Broader narrative and theological context of John

John is written to inspire belief that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God, and that believing brings life (John 20:31). Themes that show up here:

- Jesus as the one who crosses boundaries to bring life.
- Signs and conversations that reveal identity: water, bread, light, “I am.”
- Witness: people keep testifying (John the Baptist, disciples, the healed, the Samaritan woman).
- The gospel moving outward: from Judea to Samaria and beyond, foreshadowing Acts in story form.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Jews and Samaritans:** long-standing hostility rooted in competing claims about Israel’s identity, sacred place (Jerusalem vs Mount Gerizim), and history. By Jesus’ day, it was more than theology; it was social and political distrust.
- **Gender and public interaction:** a rabbi speaking publicly and privately with a woman could be viewed as improper, and with a Samaritan woman even more scandalous.
- **Honor/shame culture:** reputation and “who you associate with” mattered. The disciples’ silence reads like: “This is awkward and risky.”
- **Agrarian economy:** harvest imagery lands because everyone understands waiting, sowing, reaping, wages, and seasons. Jesus uses their daily realities to teach spiritual readiness and shared labor.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Setting in Jesus’ ministry:** early to mid-public ministry, before the final Jerusalem conflict peaks (roughly late 20s AD, often placed around AD 27-30).



- **Gospel composition:** John is commonly dated later than the Synoptics (often around AD 90-100), written in Greek for a community reflecting on Jesus' meaning for a widening world.
- **Story-world timing:** the Samaritan episode happens during Jesus' travel from Judea toward Galilee, with an intentional stop in Samaria.

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Original language and dating

- John is written in Greek, with a style that is simple in vocabulary but layered in meaning (double meanings, symbols, misunderstandings that become teaching moments).
- The passage carries that "layered simplicity" strongly: food, fields, harvest, eyes, work.

Major stages of English translation (very brief)

- Early English streams include Wycliffe (from Latin), then Tyndale (from Greek), then the King James Version, and later waves of more "formal" (NASB, ESV) and more "dynamic" (NIV, NLT) translations, and modern updates that balance accuracy and clarity (NRSV, CSB, etc.).

Theologically significant translation choices in this passage

- **"Food" / "nourishment"** (John 4:32-34): Greek uses the idea of something that sustains. Some translations keep "food," others clarify with "nourishment." The point is desire and energy coming from obedience, not consumption.
- **"Finish/complete his work"** (v. 34): the verb can mean to bring something to its intended goal, not just "wrap up tasks." It hints at Jesus' larger mission culminating later ("It is finished" in John 19:30).
- **"Lift up your eyes" / "open your eyes"** (v. 35): not just looking, but perceiving. Jesus is pushing spiritual attentiveness.
- **"Ripe/white for harvest":** "white" can refer to grain heads or general readiness. The metaphor is about urgency and opportunity, not date-setting.
- **"Wages" and "fruit"** (v. 36): "wages" is a jarring word in a spiritual passage. It can be read as reward, but John often frames reward as participation in eternal life and joy, not payment for performance. Helpful to say: God honors labor, but the point is shared joy, not earning salvation.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Metaphorically, this passage is about what we miss when we are "well-trained" but spiritually distracted.

1. The disciples' silence as a mirror

They see something socially messy (Jesus with "the wrong person") and freeze.

- a. Modern parallel: we see need, but we do not want the social cost of being associated with it. In a small-town context, that can be fear of gossip, fear of being misunderstood, fear of being labeled as "one of those people."

2. The woman leaving the water jar

This is a picture of reordered priorities. The jar represents routine survival. She does not stop needing water, but she recognizes a bigger truth: her life is not only about getting through the day; it is about being known and being sent.

- a. In Grant County terms: the "water jar" can be the daily grind, family stress, addiction cycles, resentment, or the quiet loneliness people carry while still showing up at the store,



the school, the factory, the church supper. Encountering Christ does not erase life's needs, but it changes what drives you.

3. **“My food is to do the will of the one who sent me”**

Jesus models an inner steadiness. He is not led by the disciples' agenda, hunger, or social anxiety. Metaphor: spiritual maturity looks like having a deeper source of energy than approval, outrage, or tribal loyalty.

a. That hits home in communities where identity can get fused with “our people,” “our politics,” “our grudges,” “our way.” Jesus is free enough to love across boundaries.

4. **“The fields are ripe”**

The disciples think in calendars; Jesus thinks in compassion. The harvest is not “somewhere else” or “someday when the town gets its act together.” It is now, and it is them.

Modern parallel: we can assume people are too hardened, too biased, too far gone, too skeptical.

a. Jesus says: look again. There are people ready for hope, not because they are perfect, but because they are thirsty.

5. **Sower and reaper rejoice together**

This rescues us from two traps: pride (thinking we did it) and despair (thinking nothing is happening). Ministry and witness are relay races.

a. Your kindness today might be someone else's breakthrough next year.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

- **Cross one boundary on purpose this week.** Initiate a respectful conversation with someone you would normally avoid or stereotype. Not to win, but to understand.
- **Practice “truth without humiliation.”** Jesus is honest with the woman, but never cruel. In small communities, people already feel watched. The church should be the safest place to be known.
- **Stop waiting for perfect conditions.** “Four months more” sounds responsible, but it can be avoidance. Ask: what good can I do this week that I keep postponing?
- **Honor unseen labor.** Encourage the people who keep sowing quietly: teachers, caregivers, volunteers, those praying faithfully. Name their work as real work.
- **Shift from outcome-obsession to faithfulness.** Harvest belongs to God. Our call is to be attentive, present, and willing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Why do you think the disciples were silent instead of asking Jesus directly?*
2. *What “water jar” do people carry today that can become an identity or a distraction?*
3. *What do you think Jesus means by “my food is to do the will of him who sent me”?*
4. *Where do you see people who are “ripe” for hope right now, but we have not noticed?*
5. *What is the difference between waiting wisely and delaying out of fear?*
6. *How does “sower and reaper rejoice together” change how we view success in church life?*
7. *What makes it hard to receive testimony from “unexpected messengers”?*
8. *If the Samaritans can say “Savior of the world,” what does that imply about who belongs at the center of God's attention?*



Addendum

Exodus 17:1-7— If It Were Said Today (Paraphrased)

We packed up and moved on like we were told, but then the taps went dry.

No water. No backup plan.

People started snapping at each other and then at the pastor. “What kind of leader brings us out here with our kids and our seniors and no way to survive?”

Someone else said, “Do not sugarcoat it. God is either with us or He is not.”

The pastor prayed, exhausted, and said, “Lord, they are one more hour away from turning on each other.”

And God answered, not with a lecture, but with a way forward:

“Go where you think nothing can come from.

Do what I tell you.

And watch me provide.”

And when help came, we wrote down the moment, because we knew: we never want to become the kind of people who only believe God is near when life is easy.

John 4:27-38 — If It Were Said Today (Plain English)

Just then the guys came back and saw Jesus talking with a woman, and it threw them off. Nobody said it out loud, but everybody was thinking it.

The woman dropped what she came for and took off into town: “Come meet the man who told me the truth about my life. Could he be the One?”

Meanwhile the disciples were pushing food at Jesus.

He said, “You think I am running on lunch. I am running on purpose. Doing what God sent me to do feeds me more than a sandwich.”

Then he looked out and said, “Stop saying, ‘Later.’ Look around. People are ready right now. The work has already started. Some of you will plant, some of you will gather, but the joy is shared.”