

# EXODUS CHAPTER 17-18

By Charles Dailey 2018 NLT CPS  
Updated 7/7/2021 Printed 10/27/2021

God has raised up a prophet in Moses and has sent him to the king of Egypt. When Moses finished with Pharaoh, the old king wanted Israel to get out now. They left, crossing the Red Sea, then Pharaoh wanted Israel back again, but the water closed over his advancing army and Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry land. But Israel was soon grumbling. They wanted water and they wanted food. The Lord supplied both, but as we begin here they were again grumbling.

## MORE TROUBLE OVER DRINKING WATER

**(17:1.) At the LORD's command, the whole community of Israel left the wilderness of Sin and moved from place to place. Eventually they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink.**

- **The Lord** had the sizable nation move in steps rather than one continuous journey.
- The great congregation was following **the Lord's** leading, but complained about the lack of **water**. They were running low.

**(2.) So once more the people complained against Moses. "Give us water to drink!" they demanded. "Quiet!" Moses replied. "Why are you complaining against me? And why are you testing the LORD?"**

- The **people** wanted to lay the responsibility for water on **Moses**, but he focused the responsibility on **the Lord**. The problem was very legitimate, but they needed to ask the **Lord**.

**(3.) But tormented by thirst, they continued to argue with Moses. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?"**

- These were serious charges against **Moses, killing their children and livestock with thirst**. **Dennis Prager** writes: "We have here more of the exaggerations and distortions that so often characterize chronic malcontents and complainers. Did these people really believe Moses took them out of Egypt to kill them? Of course not. But when complainers get angry they often exercise no restraint over their tongues and say whatever mean-spirited thoughts come into their heads."

Prager, Dennis. *The Rational Bible: Exodus* (p. 190).  
Regnery Faith. Kindle Edition.

**(4.) Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What should I do with these people? They are ready to stone me!" (5.) The LORD said to Moses, "Walk out in front of the people. Take your staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile, and call some of the elders of Israel to join you.**

- **Moses** sensed that the **people** were ready to kill him.
- Get out that lowly shepherd's **staff** again, **Moses**. **The Lord** had a solution. Moses couldn't pick up that rod without remembering the power of God. The confidence he received by picking up the rod was a confidence in God, not in himself.

**(6.) I will stand before you on the rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come gushing out. Then the people will be able to drink." So Moses struck the rock as he was told, and water gushed out as the elders looked on.**

- The Lord told **Moses** where to **stand and strike the rock**. There would be **water** and Israel could **drink**. And it transpired before the eyes of **the elders** of Israel. To do such a thing in front of the nation and the elders meant Moses had to have a lot of trust in God. He would look very foolish if he failed, so he had to depend greatly on God.



- Many believe the place was *Feiran Oasis* pictured above. There is no way to know for certain.

**(7.) Moses named the place Massah (which means "test".) and Meribah (which means "arguing".) because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD here with us or not?"**

- Had they forgotten where their breakfast came from? **The Lord** was caring for them each day. The names of these places became part of their history. Note how **Moses** spoke of this event in later years:

**You must not test the LORD your God as you did when you complained at Massah.** (Deuteronomy 6:16 NLT)

**You also made the LORD angry at Taberah, Massah, and Kibroth-hattaavah.**

(Deuteronomy 9:22 NLT)

**Moses said this about the tribe of Levi: "O LORD, You have given Your Thummim and Urim--the sacred lots--to Your faithful servants the Levites. You put them to the test at Massah and struggled with them at the waters of Meribah." (Deuteronomy 33:8 NLT)**

## WAR WITH AMALEK

**(8.) While the people of Israel were still at Rephidim, the warriors of Amalek attacked them.**

- **Amalek** the nation, was the grandson of Esau. Genesis 36:12. They were nomads (constantly moving tent dwellers). **Wilbur Fields** suggests a reason for the attack:

... probably it was precipitated by the fear of the Amalekites that the Israelites would occupy all the good pasture spots and springs in Sinai. There the grass dries up in the lower districts by the beginning of summer, and the nomads seek pasture at the cooler heights, the very area where the Israelites were now entering.

- Moses wrote more about this attack in Deuteronomy:

**"Never forget what the Amalekites did to you as you came from Egypt. They attacked you when you were exhausted and weary, and they struck down those who were straggling behind. They had no fear of God.** (Deut. 25:17-18 NLT)

**(9.) Moses commanded Joshua, "Choose some men to go out and fight the army of Amalek for us. Tomorrow, I will stand at the top of the hill, holding the staff of God in my hand."**

- This is the first mention of **Joshua**. He was in training as the military leader of Israel and eventually led the nation into the land of promise.
- That shepherd's **staff** has appeared again in the story. **God** continually reminds **Moses** of his own years of training in the wilderness.

**(10.) So Joshua did what Moses had commanded and fought the army of Amalek. Meanwhile, Moses, Aaron, and Hur climbed to the top of a nearby hill.**

- **Hur** is new to the story and unknown. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus says (*Antiquities III,ii,4*) that **Hur** was the husband of **Moses'** older sister Miriam. The Bible does not say.

**(11.) As long as Moses held up the staff in his hand, the Israelites had the advantage. But whenever he dropped his hand, the Amalekites gained the advantage.**

- The fate of Israel in battle depended on Moses' intercession because when he prayed Israel prevailed and when he stopped praying Amalek prevailed.

**(12.) Moses' arms soon became so tired he could no longer hold them up. So Aaron and Hur found a stone for him to sit on. Then they stood on each side of Moses, holding up his hands. So his hands held steady until sunset.**

- It's easy to understand why **Moses** grew weary **holding up his hands**. His brother **Aaron** and **Hur** propped his **hands until sunset**.



**(13.) As a result, Joshua overwhelmed the army of Amalek in battle.**

- Under the leadership of **Joshua**, Israel won the battle and the Lord's people prevailed against these **Amalek** attackers.

**(14.) After the victory, the LORD instructed Moses, "Write this down on a scroll as a permanent reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will erase the memory of Amalek from under heaven."**

- **Moses** was to write the history of this mini-war and be sure that Joshua heard it. God will blot out the memory of the **Amalekites from under heaven**. They would be exterminated. The document that Moses wrote may have been incorporated into Exodus later.
- Critics of Scripture claim that **Moses** could not write. The **Lord** said that he could.

**(15.) Moses built an altar there and named it Yahweh-nissi (which means "the LORD is my banner"). (16.) He said, "They have raised their fist against the LORD's throne, so now the LORD will be at war with Amalek generation after generation."**

### **JETHRO BRINGS MOSES' FAMILY TO HIM**

**(18:1.) Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, heard about everything God had done for Moses and His people, the Israelites. He heard especially about how the LORD had rescued them from Egypt.**

- **Jethro** was a **priest**. He was not Hebrew nor was he a part of the Israelite nation. He was a worshiper of the God of heaven, though we don't know how much he may have known about **the Lord**.

- **Jethro** had heard how the **Lord** brought out the nation from **Egypt**. It was not **Moses**, but **the Lord**. The marvelous escape had been talked about at the watering holes all over the region.

(2.) Earlier, Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons back to Jethro, who had taken them in. (3.) (Moses' first son was named Gershom, for Moses had said when the boy was born, "I have been a foreigner in a foreign land." (4.) His second son was named Eliezer, for Moses had said, "The God of my ancestors was my helper; He rescued me from the sword of Pharaoh.")

- **Moses** named the boys with reference to his present situation. In the name **Gershom** is the idea that he would someday return to his people in Egypt. In the name of **Eliezer** was the idea that God would help him when he had conflict with **Pharaoh**.

(5.) Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, now came to visit Moses in the wilderness. He brought Moses' wife and two sons with him, and they arrived while Moses and the people were camped near the mountain of God. (6.) Jethro had sent a message to Moses, saying, "I, Jethro, your father-in-law, am coming to see you with your wife and your two sons." (7.) So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law. He bowed low and kissed him. They asked about each other's welfare and then went into Moses' tent.

- **Jethro** sent word ahead that he was coming with the family of **Moses**.

### **MOSES UPDATES JETHRO ON GOD'S DEALINGS**

(8.) Moses told his father-in-law everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and Egypt on behalf of Israel. He also told about all the hardships they had experienced along the way

**and how the LORD had rescued His people from all their troubles.**

- **Wilbur Fields** describes the meeting:

He reported all that JEHOVAH had done. He gave all the credit to Jehovah, which was surely the right thing to do. Notice that Moses used the divine name *Jehovah* (Yahweh) in reporting God's deeds for them. Note also that the text says God had done these thing "for Israel's sake." ...

Interestingly the text does not suggest that Moses related to Jethro about the rebelliousness of the people.

**(9.) Jethro was delighted when he heard about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel as He rescued them from the hand of the Egyptians.**

- **James Smith** writes: "Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things Yahweh had done for his people. He burst forth into praise to Yahweh. This is not Jethro's conversion, as some commentators imagine, but his elation that his own God had been so gracious."

**(10.) "Praise the LORD," Jethro said, "for He has rescued you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. Yes, He has rescued Israel from the powerful hand of Egypt! (11.) I know now that the LORD is greater than all other gods, because He rescued His people from the oppression of the proud Egyptians."**

- **To Jethro**, the deliverance was another evidence of the power of **the LORD** as compared to the **gods** of Egypt.

**(12.) Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God. Aaron and all the elders of Israel came out and joined him in a sacrificial meal in God's presence.**

- **Jethro** expressed his joy as he worshiped **God** through **sacrifices and offerings.**

- The national leaders had a dinner showing their solidarity with **Jethro**. This was in **the presence of God**.

### **JETHRO SEES MOSES BEING OVERWORKED**

**(13.) The next day, Moses took his seat to hear the people's disputes against each other. They waited before him from morning till evening.**

- Israel had already proven themselves to be a contentious people with **Moses** and the same attitude kept them from solving problems with their own neighbors. So they brought their disputes to **Moses** for him to solve. Oh, the irony!

**(14.) When Moses' father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he asked, "What are you really accomplishing here? Why are you trying to do all this alone while everyone stands around you from morning till evening?"**

- The crowd must have seemed oppressive to a country fellow like Jethro. He asked what was being **accomplished**.

**(15.) Moses replied, "Because the people come to me to get a ruling from God. (16.) When a dispute arises, they come to me, and I am the one who settles the case between the quarreling parties. I inform the people of God's decrees and give them His instructions."**

- **Moses** knew what **God** had commanded and so the people came to inquire of **Moses**.

**(17.) "This is not good!" Moses' father-in-law exclaimed. (18.) "You're going to wear yourself out--and the people, too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself.**

- Understand, Jethro was not criticizing the Lord, but the administrator of the nation. Being a one-man Supreme Court was too much for **Moses** and he need to fix the problem.

## **“SET UP MORE COURTS”**

**(19.) Now listen to me, and let me give you a word of advice, and may God be with you. You should continue to be the people's representative before God, bringing their disputes to Him. (20.) Teach them God's decrees, and give them His instructions. Show them how to conduct their lives.**

- Perhaps **God** had sent Jethro to correct Moses' job description. He told Moses to:
  - **Represent the people before God** in the event of difficult cases.
  - He was **to warn the people** about following **God's decrees, and give them His instructions**. He was to instruct the **people** on how to live.

**(21.) But select from all the people some capable, honest men who fear God and hate bribes. Appoint them as leaders over groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten.**

- Moses was to search out **God-fearing men** who could not be **bribed** and set them up as **leaders** over segments of Israel.

**(22.) They should always be available to solve the people's common disputes, but have them bring the major cases to you. Let the leaders decide the smaller matters themselves. They will help you carry the load, making the task easier for you.**

- These chiefs were to be judges over **the people** and handle their disputes. The larger matters can still be brought to Moses.

**(23.) If you follow this advice, and if God commands you to do so, then you will be able to endure the pressures, and all these people will go home in peace."**

- **God** will assist with the major decision brought to Moses and the people will get quick judgments from the chiefs so they don't have to stand in line all day to be heard.

**(24.) Moses listened to his father-in-law's advice and followed his suggestions. (25.) He chose capable men from all over Israel and appointed them as leaders over the people. He put them in charge of groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten. (26.) These men were always available to solve the people's common disputes. They brought the major cases to Moses, but they took care of the smaller matters themselves. (27.) Soon after this, Moses said good-bye to his father-in-law, who returned to his own land.**

- **Prager** makes an excellent observation: “Moses took the criticism and advice from his father-in-law—not someone from whom many people easily take advice or criticism—and acted upon everything Jethro suggested. Moses obviously trusted him.

But, perhaps even more importantly, Moses rationally concluded the criticism and advice were valid. While Moses could take criticism and advice from Jethro because he respected and trusted him, there was an even more important reason he could do so: Moses cared more about the welfare of the Israelite people than he did about his ego. This is one of the reasons the Torah could write that Moses was the most humble man on earth (Numbers 12:3).

Prager, Dennis. *The Rational Bible: Exodus* (p. 205). Regnery Faith. Kindle Edition.

- For **Moses** to effectively delegate, he must still have oversight and leadership over those under him. One writer said: “Delegation is the exercise of leadership, not the abandoning of it.

“Delegation somewhat relates to transfer of authority. Indeed, delegation is the downward transfer of authority from a superior to a subordinate. This is important because the

superior cannot look after all the processes. Also, this helps him manage his work, as it is impractical for a specific superior to handle the volume of work all by himself.

“The delegation of authority allows for concentration of time on more important activities in an organisation. Further, it provides a sense of responsibility, a chance to grow and exercise initiatives to whom the authority is delegated.”

**Moses** was developing and disbursing leadership in the emerging nation of Israel.