

Exodus 17-18
August 24, 2014

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Can you bring to mind the worst leader you've ever served under? If so, what made them a poor leader? [Let people brainstorm]

Q: What traits would you look for in a godly leader? [Let people brainstorm]

All of us have probably experienced the continuum of being under poor leadership, average leadership, and exceptional leadership. We all know what it's like to work with someone who is unpredictable in their reactions, inconsistent in their follow through, unavailable or inaccessible to talk to, unprepared for staff meetings, etc. I believe that God has placed us in this world to influence others in positive ways. More importantly, I believe we are called to influence others to act according to God's principles and teachings.

The most common leadership role is being a parent. A godly parent will lead by example and influence their children to act according to God's teachings. Many of you also have leadership roles, whether it's official or not, in your workplace. You don't have to have an official title of "supervisor, director, or manager" to be a leader in your workplace or your home or among friends. You can be an informal leader wherever you are and have great influence. I bet names came to mind as soon as I said that!

Transition: Moses is still leading the Israelite community through the desert, and he continues to find it challenging! However, I think Moses is a strong model of leadership for us. ***So no matter what stage of life you're in, we can be strong leaders in our circles of influence by cultivating the leadership traits of Moses that we will identify shortly in today's passage.*** To that end, as we go through chapters 17 and 18, let's identify the leadership traits that Moses demonstrates. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Ex 17:1-7]

Observations/Process Qs-

Exodus 17

V.1:

- The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

V.2:

- So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?" [A godly leader is discerning. Moses was able to look beyond the surface of their complaint and help the Israelites understand the more important dynamic that was going on, i.e. they were testing the Lord.]

V.3:

- But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”

V.4:

- Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.” [A godly leader who is hearing discontent or blame for his people’s circumstance, turns to the Lord for help. Moses also knew his capacity to handle the Israelites. Instead of lashing out at them while he was exasperated, he turned to the Lord.]

V.5:

- The LORD answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.

V.6:

- I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. [A godly leader is obedient to whatever the Lord tells him to do.]

V.7:

- And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”
- Q: What leadership traits do you see in Moses in these verses? [See yellow highlights]

[Read Ex 17:8-16]

V.8:

- The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.

V.9:

- Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.” [Godly leaders give good direction to their people and then stand in the gap to intercede for their people.]

V.10:

- So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill.

V.11:

- As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.

V.12:

- When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. [Godly leaders, even when fatigued, keep praying for their people until God answers.]

V.13:

- So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

V.14:

- Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”

V.15:

- **Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner.** [Godly leaders give honor to God for how He delivers His children.]

V.16:

- He said, “For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”
- Q: What leadership traits do you see in Moses in these verses? [See yellow highlights]
- Rhetorical Q: Is there a trait you see in Moses that you’d like to cultivate more?

[Read Ex 18:1-12]

V.1:

- Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.

V.2:

- After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her

V.3:

- and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, “I have become an alien in a foreign land”;

V.4:

- and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, “My father’s God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.”

V.5:

- Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, together with Moses’ sons and wife, came to him in the desert, where he was camped near the mountain of God.

V.6:

- Jethro had sent word to him, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons.”

V.7:

- So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent.

V.8:

- Moses told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them.

V.9:

- Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians.

V.10:

- **He said, “Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians.** [Jethro knew acknowledged the Lord for the success of Moses and the delivery of the Israelites out of Egypt.]

- Rhetorical Q: Are we quick to give the Lord credit for our successes?

V.11:

- Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly.”

V.12:

- Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law in the presence of God. [Jethro facilitated the leaders of Israel to worship God through burnt offerings and other sacrifices.]
- Q: What leadership traits do you see in Jethro and/or Moses in these verses? [See yellow highlights]
- Q: This is a feel-good passage. What do you most like about Jethro? [eager to bring Moses’s family to reunite them; he has a heart for God and was delighted to hear all the good news; he’s a god-fearing priest]

[Read Ex 18:13-27]

V.13:

- The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening.

V.14:

- When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, “What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?”

V.15:

- Moses answered him, “Because the people come to me to seek God’s will.

V.16:

- Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and laws.”

V.17:

- Moses’ father-in-law replied, “What you are doing is not good.

V.18:

- You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.

V.19:

- Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people’s representative before God and bring their disputes to him.

V.20:

- Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. [Godly leaders aren’t afraid to share their knowledge, groom their replacements, etc. It’s a form of mentoring.]

V.21:

- But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

V.22:

- Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you.

V.23:

- If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.”

V.24:

- **Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said.** [Godly leaders listen to godly advice from others; they are not afraid of change for the better, etc]

V.25:

- He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

V.26:

- They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

V.27:

- Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.
- Q: What leadership traits do you see in Moses in these verses? [See yellow highlights]
- Q: Do you have a “Jethro” in your life? If yes, consider yourself blessed!
- Rhetorical Q: Is there a trait you see in Moses that you’d like to cultivate more?

LOOK:

I realize that not everyone considers themselves as a “leader,” but in God’s Kingdom, you are leader because ***you have the power to influence others*** through the power of the Holy Spirit. You can be married, single, widowed, and you still have people in your lives who are taking their cues from you, which makes you a “leader” whether you own that or not!

Q: As we conclude today’s lesson, what leadership traits did you observe in Moses that you would like to cultivate more?

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Ex 17–18)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

I. Water from the Rock (17:1–7)

The congregation had thirsted before (15:22) and God had met their needs, but, like people today, they forgot God's mercy. After all, if they were in the place of God's leading, it was His responsibility to take care of them. The people criticized Moses and murmured against God, a sin about which we are warned in 1 Cor. 10:1–12. They were actually "tempting the Lord" by their attitude, for they were saying that God did not care and that He would not help them. They were trying His patience by their repeated complaints.

Moses illustrates what the trusting Christian does in the hour of trial: he turned to the Lord and asked for guidance (James 1:5). The Lord instructed him to take his rod and to smite the rock and water would come out. This rock is Christ (1 Cor. 10:4), and the smiting of the rock speaks of Christ's death on the cross, where He felt the rod of the curse of the law. (It was this same rod, you will recall, that turned into a serpent, Ex. 4:2–3, and that helped to bring the plagues on Egypt.) The order here is wonderful: in chap. 16 we have the manna, illustrating Christ's coming to earth; in chapter 17 we see the smiting of the rock, which pictures His death on the cross. The water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, who was given after Christ had been glorified (John 7:37–39).

Read Num. 20:1–13 for a second experience with the rock. God commanded Moses to speak to the rock, but in his self-will, Moses smote the rock. Then, because of this sin, he was not permitted to enter Canaan. By once again striking the rock, Moses spoiled the type—Christ can die only once. See Rom. 6:9–10 and Heb. 9:26–28. The Spirit was given once, but the believer may receive added fillings by asking God.

First Corinthians 10:4 says that Israel "drank of that spiritual rock that followed them." Some have interpreted this to mean that the smitten rock traveled with the Jews through the wilderness, but this explanation is unlikely. The word "them" is not in the original Greek text; the sentence says that they drank of the water from the rock, and that this event followed the giving of the manna (cf. 1 Cor. 10:3 with Ex. 16).

II. Warfare with the Enemy (17:8–16)

The new Christian sometimes is amazed that the Christian life is one of battles as well as blessings. Up to this point, Israel had not had to fight; the Lord had fought for them (13:17). But now, the Lord chose to fight through them to overcome the enemy. The Amalekites were descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:12, 16) and can illustrate the opposition of the flesh (Gen. 25:29–34). Israel was delivered from the world (Egypt) once and for all by crossing the Red Sea, but God's people will always battle the flesh until Christ returns.

Note that the Amalekites did not appear until after the water was given; for when the Holy Spirit comes in to dwell, then the flesh begins to oppose Him (Gal. 5:17ff). Deuteronomy 25:17–19 tells us that the Amalekites pulled a "sneak attack" and came up from the rear. As Christians we must always "watch and pray."

How did Israel overcome the enemy? They had an intercessor on the mountain and a commander in the valley! Moses' role on the mountain illustrates the intercessory work of Christ, and Joshua with his sword illustrates the Spirit of God using the Word of God against the

enemy (Heb. 4:12 and Eph. 6:17–18). Of course, Moses is an imperfect picture of Christ and His intercessory work, since our Lord never wearies and needs no assistance (Heb. 4:16; 9:24). Paul says that believers can “help together by prayer” (2 Cor. 1:11), which is what Aaron and Hur did. Moses had the rod of God in his hand, which speaks of God’s almighty power. Moses had defeated every enemy in Egypt, just as Christ has overcome the world in mighty victory.

It is important that God’s people cooperate with God in gaining victory over the flesh. Romans 6 tells us to reckon and to yield, and by faith to put to death the deeds of the body. Moses alone on the mount could not win the battle, nor could Joshua alone on the battlefield: victory required both of them. How wonderful that we have the interceding Son of God who is for us (Rom. 8:34), and the indwelling Spirit of God who is for us (Rom. 8:26), plus the inspired Word of God in our hearts!

Note that Joshua did not completely destroy the Amalekites; he “discomfited” them (v. 13). The flesh will never be destroyed or “eradicated” in this life; Christ will give us new bodies when He returns (Phil. 3:21). In 1 Sam. 15 we will see that Saul’s sin was in refusing to deal completely with the Amalekites; and 2 Sam. 1:6–10 informs us that it was one of the Amalekites Saul spared that killed him! “Make no provision for the flesh” (Rom. 13:14, NKJV).

Jehovah-Nissi means “The Lord our banner.” We have our victory not through our own efforts but through Christ alone (John 16:33; 1 John 2:13–14; 5:4–5).

III. Wisdom from the World (18)

Bible students disagree as to the interpretation of this chapter, whether Jethro’s advice to Moses was of the Lord or of the flesh. Some point to Num. 11 where God took of His Spirit and distributed the power among the seventy officers, suggesting that Moses already had all the power he needed to get the job done. God had told Moses back in chapters 3–4 that He alone would supply the needed grace to do the job. In v. 11, Jethro called Jehovah “greater than all gods,” but this is a far cry from a definite confession of faith in the true God. Furthermore, in v. 27, we see Jethro refusing to stay with Israel, but going back to his own people.

Certainly our God is a God of order, and there is nothing wrong with organization. In the NT the apostles added the deacons to assist them when the burdens of ministry became too great (Acts 6). God’s people can learn even from outsiders (Luke 16:8), but we must test everything by the Word of God (Isa. 8:20). We wonder if this “worldly wisdom” from Jethro was pleasing to God, for Jethro himself was not sure (see v. 23). He was willing to rejoice in all that the Lord had done (vv. 9–10), but he was not willing to believe that God could help Moses with the everyday burdens of life. Moses adopted Jethro’s scheme, and the people agreed to it (Deut. 1:9–18), but we have no assurance that God approved the new arrangement. In fact, God’s attitude in Num. 11 suggests otherwise.

Believers face open and obvious attacks of the flesh, as with Amalek (17:8–16); but also subtle ideas of the flesh, as with Jethro. Certainly Moses could have done whatever work God called him to do, for “God’s commandments are His enablements.” How easy it is for us to pity ourselves, to feel that nobody else cares and that God has given us too great a burden! Read Isa. 40:31 for God’s solution to this problem.

Toussaint, S. D. (1985). Acts. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures. (Vol. 2, pp. 135–137). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

c. *The provisions at Rephidim (chap. 17)*

This chapter records two additional provisions by God for His people: water (vv. 1–7) and victory in battle (vv. 8–16). God was demonstrating that He is capable of nourishing and sustaining His own.

17:1–7. After the nation left **the Desert of Sin.... they camped at Rephidim**. (But they also camped at Dophkah and Alush before Rephidim, Num. 33:12–14.) Rephidim is traditionally thought to be present-day Wadi Refayld near Jebel Musa, the supposed site of Mount Sinai.

Parched from their journey and finding **no water** in the oasis, **the people** again complained against **Moses** and blamed him for taking them **out of Egypt** (cf. Ex. 16:3). This was worse than their murmurings of distrust at Marah (15:24) or in the Desert of Sin (16:2), for here they even **quarreled with Moses** (17:2) and were about **to stone** him (v. 4). Such quarreling, Moses said, was putting **the LORD to the test** (v. 2), that is, they were challenging **the LORD** or trying His patience (v. 7) rather than trusting Him.

But God was patient with His disobedient and grumbling people. He told **Moses to take ... the staff with which** he had **struck the Nile River** (7:20) and to **strike a rock at Horeb** (17:6). This “staff of God” (4:20; 17:9) was a symbol of power; holding it was a sign of dependence and trust in God. Though Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, Israel did not camp at Sinai until later (19:1). However, “Horeb” can also mean the Sinai region. Rephidim was close to Sinai so that the mountain slopes reached there. In Moses’ striking the rock, the Lord was pleased to satiate His thirsty people with an abundant supply of **water**. So the Lord provided for them through another miracle. Because the people had tested the Lord there, **Moses called the place** by two names: **Massah** (“testing”) and **Meribah** (“quarreling”).

17:8–16. **At Rephidim** the Lord also gave His people a military victory. **The Amalekites** were nomads in the desert south of Canaan (cf. 1 Sam. 15:7; 27:8). They were descendants of Esau through Eliphaz (Gen. 36:12). They apparently were attempting to dislodge the Israelites from this pleasant oasis and to secure their territory from intrusion. In this crisis **Moses** called on **Joshua**, who is mentioned here for the first time. Though Joshua entered into battle with zeal, the victory was secured in a unique fashion in order to demonstrate God’s power. Moses’ holding **the staff of God** (cf. Ex. 4:20) above his head with both **hands** symbolized Israel’s total dependence on the power of God. When Moses lowered his hands, a picture of lack of dependence, the enemy was **winning**. With the assistance of **Aaron and Hur** Moses’ hands **remained** uplifted and a great victory was secured. (Hur is mentioned only here; 17:12; and in 24:14; 1 Chron. 2:19–20; the Hur mentioned in Ex. 31:2; 35:30; 38:22 is probably another person. Still another Hur, a Midianite king, is referred to in Num. 31:8; Josh 13:21.)

The defeat of **the Amalekites** was something God wanted **Joshua** to remember. The Amalekites remained a persistent, harassing enemy of Israel (cf. Num. 14:45; Jud. 6:33; 1 Sam. 14:48; 15:7; 27:8) until they were finally destroyed by King David (1 Sam. 30). **Moses** commemorated the victory in his day by building **an altar** which he named **the LORD is my Banner**. An interesting sidelight is that Exodus 17:14 includes the first mention in the Bible of the writing of official records, though Moses did keep some type of a diary of the sojourn (Num. 33:2). God proved Himself faithful in preserving and protecting His people.

d. *The provision of wise counsel for Moses (chap. 18)*

The story of Jethro’s visit contrasts with the Amalekite confrontation. One came to fight, the other to seek knowledge; with one there was war, with the other judging or mediating for peace;

with one, Moses' hand grew heavy, with the other his work was too heavy. The chapter has three sections: the setting for the visit of Jethro (vv. 1–6), the praise of Jethro (vv. 7–12), and the advice of Jethro (vv. 13–27).

18:1–6. Hearing of the Exodus, **Jethro, Moses' father-in-law** (cf. 4:18; also known as Reuel, 2:18), visited **Moses** when Israel was camped at Rephidim **near Sinai** (see comments on 17:16 regarding Horeb and Sinai), **the mountain of God** (18:5; cf. 3:1; 4:27; 24:13). **Jethro** apparently had followed the affairs of his son-in-law with interest so that when the Israelites camped at Rephidim Jethro determined to see him. Jethro came also to reunite his grandsons **Gershom** (“banishment”; cf. comments on 2:22) and **Eliezer** (“my God is help”) and daughter **Zipporah** with Moses, for Moses had apparently **sent** them back to Jethro after they had started for Egypt. Though the reason for that action is not stated, Moses may have wanted to protect them from the horrors of the Egyptian bondage. So now, several months later, Moses was reunited with his family.

18:7–12. Moses' meeting with Jethro was marked by gestures of respect (**bowed down**) and gratitude (**kissed**) as they greeted each other. **Moses** rehearsed the many exciting events that had occurred since he returned to Egypt, particularly **how the LORD** delivered **them**. Delighted with this wonderful news, **Jethro** responded, **Praise be to the LORD**. Jethro then gave the marvelous testimony that he knew **that the LORD**, the God of Israel, **is greater than all other gods**. Convinced of Yahweh's superiority, **Jethro** offered **sacrifices** to show his respect for **God**. The **burnt offering** was totally consumed by fire but fellowship offerings (**other sacrifices**) were part of a communal meal which Jethro shared with Israel's leaders possibly in making a covenant or peace agreement. The scene is one of jubilant praise and fellowship, but Jethro's true spiritual condition is not explicitly stated. He returned to Midian (v. 27), either as a convert to the true God or perhaps continuing as a priest for the idolatrous Midianites. His later words to Moses seem to suggest that he now feared God (“may God be with you,” v. 19; “select ... men who fear God,” v. 21; “God so commands,” v. 23).

18:13–23. Jethro observed that much of Moses' time was taken up in answering disputes and inquiries as the **judge of the people**, who sought through him (their prophet, Deut. 34:10) to know **God's will**. Because of this work overload which **Moses** was trying to do all by himself (**Why do you alone sit as judge?... You cannot handle it alone**, Ex. 18:14, 18) Jethro warned that Moses would become overexhausted. Also the **people** would be worn out (v. 18), waiting for their turns to present their cases.

Wisely, Jethro urged **Moses** to delegate some of his responsibilities. But Moses was to continue teaching the people the **laws** of God (cf. v. 16) and how **to live** before Him and to appoint spiritually and morally qualified **men** as judges to implement the keeping of the Law (vv. 20–21). They were to be “wise ... respected ... and leading men” in their tribes (Deut. 1:13, 15). **Moses** was to **be the people's representative before God** (Ex. 18:19) and their teacher but most judicial matters were to be given to others. As **officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens** (words used of those in military rank) they were to serve in various levels of civil courts to hear cases of varying degrees of importance.

18:24–27. Accepting his father-in-law's advice, **Moses** apparently implemented the judicial court system after the Law was given at Mount Sinai (Deut. 1:9–15; cf. Horeb in Deut. 1:6). If so, then possibly Exodus 18:24–26, about the later implementation of the plan, was included in the narrative here to complete the story about Jethro's advice. Occasionally Old Testament writers treated subjects topically rather than in strict chronological sequence.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 112). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

17:5–6 Providing enough water in a desert to quench the thirst of a group of more than 600,000 men, besides women and children, was a miracle of the highest order, all the more impressive considering that Israel spent 40 years in the desert. Moses' striking of the rock was not what produced the water, but rather God standing with Moses at the rock (v. 6).

17:14 If God blotted out the remembrance of Amalek, why do we still know about them? Even the inclusion of this verse in the Bible ensures that Amalek would never be forgotten. It is clear that the phrase “blot out the memory” in this context means “to remove any concern that Amalek would pose a threat to another nation.” That promise was fulfilled during the days of King David (1 Sm 30:16–17).

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