

WATER·FIRE·STONE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MOSES

Session 8 – Sticks and Stones, Part Two | Exodus Chapters 17–18

You're thirsty. So dry, you can barely swallow. Your head throbs. Your heart is thumping too fast, too shallow to catch your breath without slowing your pace. You want to sit down in the shade and rest but that's not an option. There is no shade—and a multitude of cranky, exhausted people are expecting you to find water. After all, you're the wilderness expert. Forty years, you should know this desert like the back of your hand! Do something!

Moses was in the crosshairs of their complaints. Again. So he did what he always did when they throttled him with criticism. He cried out to the Lord. "What am I to do with these people?" As a leader, he was responsible for their safety and well-being. As a man, he felt stressed and alone out there in front. As always, God would supply all their needs.



Life. Some days you just want to wrap it in caution tape and declare a stress-free zone. Escape the pressure, avoid the conflict. Moses sure did. Faced with fierce opposition and immense frustration, Moses held it together and led well. How did he deal with the mounting stress in the wilderness?

In this second session of our two-part series, Sticks and Stones, we explore what makes our difficulties and limitations an opportunity to grow when we worship and work together.

Icebreaker

What is the best advice you've been given recently and how did it help you?

Goals for this Session

- Discover the vital connection between worship and working together.
- Consider what makes us vulnerable to sneak attacks and victorious in battle.
- Pray for humility to listen and learn from others and invest ourselves wisely.

1 Read Exodus 17:1–7 | Rephidim was the last stop for Israel on their way to meet God at Mt. Sinai. Rephidim means “rest stop” but as campsites go, it was a major disappointment. Water was an issue again, escalating tension in the camp. This time, they don’t just complain. They threaten.

- a. The people *contended* with Moses. This is a legal term that describes bringing a lawsuit against someone. What were they accusing Moses of and what did they intend to do?

But they are not putting just Moses on trial. From Moses’ response in verses 2 and 7, what are they actually doing?

Is their complaint legitimate? Briefly list (from memory) all the tangible ways that God has been present and providing for them along the way.

In your observation, who should be on trial here, and why?

- b. “Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock.” God told Moses to *strike the rock* and when he did, water came gushing out like a river (Psalm 78:15–16).

In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul identifies that rock with Jesus, which makes this incident significant for us. Use the verses below to explain how the rock points to Jesus.

Isaiah 53:4–5

John 4:10, 13–14

John 7:37–39

Revelation 21:6

Revelation 22:17

The last time God told Moses to lift up his staff, it was a rod of deliverance to part the Red Sea.

But here, God likens it to the rod of judgment which Moses used to turn the water of the Nile to blood.

God sets up the scene like a courtroom in the desert. Moses is told to go before the people, and with the elders as witness, he must strike the rock.

God stands in the place of the accused and takes the punishment they deserve.

The stricken rock shows us the gospel of grace, even in Old Testament times.

2 Is the Lord with us or not? Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarreling) became a lasting reminder to Israel of their incessant complaining and grumbling against God. Forty years later, “remember Massah” was Moses’ way of warning the next generation not to *go there* ever again (Deuteronomy 6:16).

- a. We all have a wilderness, the hard places intended to help us grow. Some are just for a season while others feel more like a long-term cycle on repeat. God’s purpose for allowing hard places is up to Him. Our response reveals how willing—*or not*—we are to trust Him.

Take a minute to identify a hard place (a relationship, responsibility, circumstance, etc.) and ask the Lord’s help to pinpoint where you are.

Think of it like Google Maps. When we resist and insist on getting our way, we drop a location pin on our wilderness map. We go back to our same old ways of dealing with conflict and tell the Lord (and anyone navigating the hard place with us) *you know where to find me*. If you’re in Massah, what needs to change? Do your best to be practical and specific.

- b. Every difficulty God permits is an opportunity to trust God and let Him grow us from the inside out—which usually starts with our attitude. Adversity is not for nothing! Think what God is using our wilderness to work in us . . . drop a pin on where you most need to be in your current circumstances:

📌 Love 📌 Joy 📌 Peace 📌 Patience 📌 Kindness 📌 Goodness
📌 Faithfulness 📌 Gentleness 📌 Self-Control

How does God’s Word shape our attitude in the wilderness?
Answer in your own words.

Psalms 119:71, 75–76

Romans 5:3–5

James 1:3–4

Philippians 2:13–15

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Are you where God would
have you be?
If not, come out at once,
for you certainly should not
be there.
If you are, then be afraid to
complain of circumstances
which God has ordained
on purpose
to work out in you the very
image and likeness
of His Son.

Mark Guy Pearse

3

Read Exodus 17:8–16 | What is happening? Describe the situation in your own words.

- a. Why would the Amalekites attack the Israelites unprovoked? Explain what they were after and the strategy they used.

Exodus 3:21–22

Exodus 11:2

Exodus 12:35–36

Deuteronomy 25:17–18

- b. What lessons and warnings stand out to you? Describe when we might be most vulnerable to sneak attacks and the best way to be prepared for that.

- c. Briefly describe what we learn from these examples. Also, who do you most identify with and why?

Moses

Joshua

Aaron and Hur

Good to Know

The Amalekites were descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. They were sworn enemies of Israel. This nomadic tribe roamed the Sinai desert and regarded it as their territory.

Memory Verse

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God,
who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.
James 1:5 ESV

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How or in what way?

EXODUS CH. 18

STICKS AND STONES, PART TWO

4 Read Exodus 18:1–12 | Here's a welcome break in the story. After all the drama and trauma of previous chapters, we get a glimpse of everyday life in the camp of Israel.

From the plagues in Egypt, the Red Sea parting, manna in the desert, and water from the rock, by now we should be used to miracles. What happens next might qualify as a miracle for some of us. Moses is elated to learn the in-laws are coming for a visit.

- a. From these verses, what do you learn about the relationship between Moses and his father-in-law?
- b. What do Jethro's words and actions reveal about his commitment to family and his heart for the Lord?

A Happy Reunion

Moses' family was with him when he first set out for Egypt, but he sent them to stay with Jethro. Knowing his family was safe during the turmoil of Egypt gave Moses peace of mind, but it would have been a long and lonely separation for him.

We wonder why more is not mentioned about Moses' reunion with his wife. Some speculate there was strain in their marriage. You think?

It's hard to say since we are peeking in a window from 3000+ years away, but it may simply be that Moses was focused on telling Israel's story, not his own.

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Read Exodus 18:13–27 | What is happening? Describe the situation in your own words.

- a. When Jethro asked Moses why the people were coming to him all day long, Moses basically answered *because they need me*. How was Jethro’s advice good for Moses and also a great help for the people?

Get in line.

Consider the logistics of Moses’ method of hearing disputes. In a 14-hour day (with one hour for lunch and two breaks) Moses could hear 78 ten-minute cases a day. The Bible says there were 600,000 men. If only 1% had a dispute (that’s a low ball estimate for this grumbling group), on any given day Moses would have 6,000 men waiting to talk to him!

- b. From verse 21, list the qualities that Moses was to look for in choosing leaders. Are these qualities still relevant and necessary today? Explain how and why.

- c. What does Moses’ response to Jethro’s advice reveal about his character?

When someone offers advice regarding an area of weakness for you, how do you usually respond? What makes it easy to receive? What makes it difficult?

- d. When giving or receiving advice, what should we aim for? Use the following verses for help, and answer in your own words.

Proverbs 15:31–33

Proverbs 12:18

Proverbs 12:25

Proverbs 16:20–24

6 Good leadership bears a responsibility to share responsibility. Moses listened to Jethro’s counsel and delegated important work to capable, godly men. That doesn’t mean his daily calendar was suddenly cleared—but his energies were redirected. He stopped trying to be a *fixer* and started being a *facilitator*.

There’s a fine line between a *can-do* attitude that motivates to good works and a *can-do-it-all* mindset that stretches you too thin. Take time to evaluate your own expectations.

⊕ Do I confuse being busy with being productive?

⊕ Do I equate doing my best with *being* the best? Who am I trying to impress?

⊕ When a need arises, am I the first one with my hand up?

⊕ Am I reluctant to delegate tasks because I can do them better myself?

⊕ Is this my motto? *If I don’t do it, it won’t get done.*

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We must learn our limits.
We are all something, but
none of us is everything.

Blaise Pascal

We are called to serve according to the strength and abilities that God has given us. What are you investing yourself in? Is it helping you to be a light or burning you out? Prayerfully consider your to-do list . . . what might need to move from the *essential* column to the *optional* column?

Action Steps ►► As you think through this part of Moses’ story, what is the most important takeaway point for you personally? How will you put what you’ve learned into action?

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. —Ephesians 6:18 NIV

Adoration – Giving praise and honor to God for who He is and what He does.

Confession – Honestly deal with sin; acknowledge to God the ways (and whys) you fall short.

Thanksgiving – Verbalize your gratitude; express your praise and a thankful heart.

Supplication – Pray specifically for the needs of others, ourselves, our church, our nation.

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Close your discussion time by praying together. Use the A·C·T·S pattern as a group focus and keep it simple. No need to be lengthy or profound, just authentic.
