

Encamped at Rephidim

Lesson Scope: [Exodus 17-18](#)

References in brackets refer to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

The children of Israel had paused to set up camp on their wilderness journey. This encampment at Rephidim was not their first stopping point since the Red Sea crossing. They had earlier pitched their tents at Marah, Elim, and the Wilderness of Sin. Numbers 33:8-14 lists other camping sites, as well, prior to Rephidim.

Israel's travel through the Sinai Peninsula was fraught with difficulty. They had been journeying through "that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water" (Deuteronomy 8:15). Now they also faced another obstacle in their journey—Amalek came out to fight against Israel at Rephidim.

In the difficulties Israel encountered, God was proving their faith and preparing them for Canaan. However, too often God's people failed to focus on the Lord's miraculous provisions for them, but chose rather to murmur and blame God's servant, Moses.

Keep the focus of on the positive aspects of how we can advance God's cause today, rather than on the negative aspects of Israel's failure. We may tend to be severe on Israel for their gross ingratitude and unbelief toward their gracious God, yet overlook areas where we may be failing to truly honor God. Do we exercise a simple faith and trust in God amid dark circumstances that may confront us? Do we obediently follow our Lord and His church, even when the way seems difficult or impossible? Are we truly submissive to the authority that is over us? Are we uncomplaining and content in the ups and downs of life and human relationships?

This lesson provides an opportunity to teach respect for the role of God-ordained leadership, as well as to emphasize the need of each member giving loyal support to God's cause. Lift up the place of the church, the body of Christ, in providing for the nurture and welfare of each member

by the exercise of the various gifts to the church. We honor Christ, our Head, by our care and concern for His body here on earth.

God moves in love for the well-being of His people. Although God's people face distressing circumstances, God calls them to move forward in faith.

Lesson Aim: To present essentials for the advancement of God's cause.

Theme Verse: [1 Corinthians 15:58](#) Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Lesson Text

Tested

[Exodus 17:1-6](#) All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Delivered

[Exodus 17:8-13](#) Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. ⁹ So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." ¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹ Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever

er he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. ¹² But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. ¹³ And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

Instructed

Exodus 18:5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God.

Exodus 18:9 And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians.

Exodus 18:13 The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening.

Exodus 18:17-23 Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸ You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. ¹⁹ Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, ²⁰ and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. ²¹ Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. ²² And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. ²³ If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace."

Questions for Study

Tested

1. Why does God allow His people to face distressing circumstances?
2. What should be our response in times of severe trial?
3. How does our loyal support of church leaders advance God's cause?

Delivered

4. What were some keys to Israel's victory over Amalek?
5. List some practical ways we can "strengthen each other's hands" in God's cause.

Instructed

6. In what ways did both Moses and the congregation benefit from Jethro's advice?
7. How does viewing the church as a corporate effort enhance her effectiveness?

Analyzing the Passage

The people's charges against Moses (17:3) were quite serious. They were actually tempting the Lord and doubting His power to provide for them as He had done previously in sending them manna. The threat to Moses' life was probably real (17:4) and not just how Moses may have perceived it. Israel's unbelief is starkly displayed in their doubting of God's presence with them (17:7).

God's directive to Moses to take the elders to be present at the smiting of the rock was possibly to provide a testimony to all Israel of the proceedings. The smitten rock is likened to Jesus Christ—"That rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus was smitten that He might provide the living water of salvation for all people.

Amalek's attack was not Israel's first encounter with this people, which were descended from Esau. A different form of aggression had been waged against Israel by Amalek previously. (See Deuteronomy 25:17-18.) Amalek typifies the flesh, that aggressive, inborn evil nature, which is the believer's constant adversary in this life.

Principles and Applications

Tested

1. God's cause prospers when His people move according to His command (17:1). Spiritual growth and God's blessing grace our congregations when we readily obey God's commands given through the church. We should not wait to comply with a church directive until we are tapped on the shoulder. The promptness of our obedience indicates the degree of our loyalty to God.
2. To advance God's cause, we must seek His help and direction (17:2, 4-5). When difficulties arise, it is our natural tendency to blame others

or to complain about our circumstances. Interpersonal difficulties and misunderstandings can strain relationships if left unresolved. In times of trouble, we do well to follow Moses' example in turning to the Lord with our needs.

3. Leaders carry weighty responsibility in advancing God's cause (17:5-6). Church leaders are accountable to God to "watch for ... souls" (Hebrews 13:17). Leaders also bear responsibility for the direction of travel of the church. Leaders are called to be watchmen—alert to the spiritual dangers that threaten the church. Our faithful support eases their burden.

Delivered

4. God's cause is advanced when His people are ready to face the enemy (17:8-10). Present-day threats to the church, such as electronic technology, casual clothing styles, business entanglements, and a materialistic outlook should concern not only leaders but also each member. To overcome, we must present a unified front against the enemy's attacks.

5. God's work prospers when His people strengthen each other's hands (17:10-13). Have you recently encouraged another? Are you sensitive enough to perceive another's struggles? Do you seek to strengthen others by good counsel and your faithful example? Do you regularly pray for the church and your fellow members in particular?

6. Fervent prayer is essential to the advancement of God's cause (17:10-11). Our best efforts are useless unless God is with us in the battles of life. Beseeching the face of the Lord in prayer moves God to strengthen His children in trial. Like Moses, we each bear a part in the victory of God's people by "lifting [our] hands" in faithful, intercessory prayer (1 Timothy 2:8).

7. God's cause is advanced when there is unity among brethren (17:12). We will not always see eye-to-eye on every issue in church life. But when our hearts throb together for the welfare of God's kingdom, we will be able to blend in brotherhood unity. Brotherly love motivates us to work through our differences for God's glory. Such oneness in Christ is a testimony for all!

Instructed

8. When God's people enter into one another's joys and trials they further God's cause (18:5, 9). Too often, we can become wrapped up in our own little corner. God requires faithfulness at home, but our hearts

should also reach out to the concerns of others (Philippians 2:4). Our interest in the broader work of the Lord adds perspective to our own sphere of service.

9. We promote God's cause when we receive good counsel (18:17-23). We need a humble spirit so that we can profit from others' advice. David was humbly grateful when he told Abigail, "Blessed be thy advice" (1 Samuel 25:33). God speaks to us through the brotherhood. It is a challenge to accept good counsel, no matter who it comes from.

10. God's work demands broad involvement of varied abilities (18:21-23). When God's work is spread among many dedicated servants, He accomplishes more than if only a few gifted individuals tried to do it all. Each makes his contribution to the body of Christ in his own small way, adding a richness and blessing to the whole! Thus humbly serving together, we bring glory to our Head, Jesus Christ.

Important Teachings

1. God's cause prospers when His people move according to His command (17:1).

2. To advance God's cause, we must seek His help and direction (17:2, 4-5).

3. Leaders carry weighty responsibility in advancing God's cause (17:5-6).

4. God's cause is advanced when His people are ready to face the enemy (17:8-10).

5. God's work prospers when His people strengthen each other's hands (17:10-13).

6. Fervent prayer is essential to the advancement of God's cause (17:10-11).

7. God's cause is advanced when there is unity among brethren (17:12).

8. When God's people enter into one another's joys and trials, they further God's cause (18:5, 9).

9. We promote God's cause when we receive good counsel (18:17-23).

10. God's work demands broad involvement of varied abilities (18:21-23).

11. There is work for all in the battle for truth and righteousness (17:9-10).

12. God's cause is advanced when we view the work as a corporate ra-

ther than personal effort (18:17-23).

13. God's people are blessed when each one does his best to advance God's cause (18:23).

Answers to Questions

1. Why does God allow His people to face distressing circumstances?

God allows distressing circumstances to deepen our dependence and trust in Him. He allows trials to test and refine the character of His children. He chastens because of His love and desire to draw each one closer to Himself. (See Deuteronomy 8:1-6, 15-16 for reasons why God allowed distressing circumstances in Israel's wilderness wanderings.)

2. What should be our response in times of severe trial?

Like Job, we should respond in unwavering faith and trust, even though we do not understand why we are experiencing the trial. We know God is in control and overruling for our best welfare. After receiving the tragic news of all his losses, "Job arose ... and worshipped" (Job 1:20).

3. How does our loyal support of church leaders advance God's cause?

When God's people give loyal support to their leaders, God's direction for the church can be more readily discerned and received. Church leaders "watch for ... souls" (Hebrews 13:17); loyal support makes their work easier, and helps protect the salvation of our own souls. Loyal support gives a unified testimony to those outside God's kingdom.

4. What were some keys to Israel's victory over Amalek?

Dedicated leadership—"Joshua did as Moses had said" (17:10). Intercession for God's people—"Moses held up his hand" (17:11). Group support and unity—"Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands" (17:12). Perseverance in the conflict—"until the going down of the sun" (17:12).

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5. List some practical ways we can "strengthen each other's hands" in God's cause.

We can "strengthen each other's hands" through the ministry of encouragement. We strengthen each other through good counsel and by consistent example. The work of intercession in prayer for each other helps to fortify us in the conflicts we face.

6. In what ways did both Moses and the congregation benefit from Jethro's advice?

By following Jethro's advice, Moses' responsibilities were lightened,

and the physical and emotional drain on him was eased. Implementing Jethro's advice also increased the involvement of others from the congregation in areas where they could share the burden in service. Authority was delegated that made the work more effective.

7. How does viewing the church as a corporate effort enhance her effectiveness?

A unified strength comes forth when each member of the church shoulders his responsibility to contribute for the good of the body. No one member views himself as more important than another member, but the Head of the body, Jesus Christ, is lifted up and honored (1 Corinthians 12:14-27). This concept takes the focus of the church off men and places it upon the Lord. The corporate effort also benefits the church in the exercise of the varied gifts and strengths of each member of the body.

Summarizing the Lesson

In the three major tests that faced Israel in our lesson, God was working for the benefit of His people. However, the Lord used dedicated servants to help resolve each of the conflicts that arose. The saying "Without God we cannot; without us He will not" does apply to church life. God seeks those who are ready to advance His cause. But we must implore His presence to indwell us, His wisdom to guide us, and His grace to sustain us if we are to faithfully advance His cause.

Research Guide

1. Trace the history of Amalek in a Bible dictionary. We have no Biblical record of Amalek's final destruction, even though it was prophesied by Balaam in Numbers 24:20. Probably this prophecy of destruction was fulfilled only as a nation, while individual descendants remained. Note that Haman was likely an Amalekite (Esther 3:1).
2. Study the significance of the rod in God's work among His people. Sometimes it is called "the rod of God" (Exodus 4:20; 17:9).
3. Ponder both occasions of the smiting of the rock in Israel's wilderness wanderings. Note the different circumstance and command of God in Numbers 20:7-11. Why may it have been right to smite the rock in the one occasion and not in the other? (See Hebrews 9:28.)