

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: Water from the Rock; Victory over Amalek

Exodus 17:1–18:27

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson moves across three connected scenes, and the teacher should help the class see how each reveals God and points toward Christ. First, the water from the rock at Massah and Meribah is one of the clearest types in the Pentateuch. Paul tells us plainly that the Rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4), so this is not fanciful allegory but apostolic teaching: the God who gave water to a thirsty, grumbling people foreshadowed the Christ who gives living water to all who come to Him (John 7:37–39). Yet the same passage carries a sober warning, for Israel's testing of God at Meribah becomes the great negative example of Hebrews 3–4, do not harden your hearts. Grumbling against God in the dry place is treated as a spiritual sin that provoked Him, and the teacher must hold the grace of the rock and the warning of Meribah together.

Second, the battle with Amalek teaches dependence and the body helping one another. Israel did not prevail by superior arms but as Moses' hands, holding the staff of God, were lifted up, and when those hands grew heavy, Aaron and Hur upheld them. This is a picture of persevering intercession and of the mutual support that marks the people of God, where no one fights alone. Third, Jethro's counsel teaches the wisdom of shared, qualified leadership. Moses was wearing himself out doing alone what God never intended one man to carry, and the remedy was to share the load with able, God-fearing, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain. This connects naturally, without overreaching, to the New Testament pattern of a plurality of qualified men sharing the oversight and work of the Lord's church (Acts 6:1–4; 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1).

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson aims at the heart of the weary and the self-reliant believer. It presses the thirsty soul to come and drink from Christ rather than to grumble in the dry place. It humbles the proud who insist on fighting and serving alone, teaching them to let their hands be held up and to hold up the hands of others. And it gently corrects the well-meaning servant who is burning out by carrying everything personally, showing that God designed His work to be shared. Help your students leave not merely knowing three desert stories, but trusting Christ for their thirst, leaning on the body God has given them, and serving humbly within the shared labor of the Lord's people.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 17:1–4. With no water at Rephidim, the people quarrel with Moses and put the Lord to the test, asking whether the Lord is among them or not. What does this scene reveal about the difference between honestly bringing our need to God and faithlessly testing Him, and why does Scripture treat this kind of grumbling so seriously (compare Numbers 14:22; Psalm 95:8–9)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene honestly. Israel has moved by stages at the Lord's command (17:1), and they arrive at Rephidim where there is no water. The need is real and severe; this is not a manufactured complaint. The problem is not that they are thirsty but what their thirst produces: they quarrel with Moses and they put the Lord to the test (17:2, 7).

Draw the crucial distinction between need and testing. To bring a real need to God in trust is faith; to demand that He prove Himself or to turn on His servant in unbelief is testing. The very question they ask, is the Lord among us or not (17:7), is the giveaway. After the plagues, the sea, and the manna, the answer was obvious; their grumbling was not a sincere question but a faithless accusation.

Show how seriously Scripture takes this. The names Massah and Meribah become shorthand in the rest of the Bible for Israel's rebellion. Psalm 95:8–9 pleads, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, where your fathers put me to the test. Numbers 14:22 lists this among the times Israel tested God ten times. Grumbling against God in the dry place is not a small thing; it provoked Him deeply.

Apply it pastorally. The dry place exposes what is in us. The same hardship that drives one believer to his knees drives another to bitterness and accusation. Help the class see that the test is not whether life will run dry, it will, but whether dryness will drive them toward God or against Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between honestly bringing need to God and faithlessly testing Him (Exodus 17:2, 7).
- Grumbling and testing God treated as serious spiritual rebellion (Psalm 95:8–9; Numbers 14:22).
- How a dry place exposes whether our hearts will trust God or turn against Him.
- The recurring danger of forgetting recent deliverance the moment a new hardship comes (Psalm 106:13–14).

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between honestly crying out to God in need and faithlessly putting Him to the test?
- Why does Scripture return again and again to Meribah as a warning?
- Where has a dry place in your life revealed what was really in your heart?

Question 2

Student Question:

Israel had walked through a split sea and gathered bread from heaven, yet one dry camp erased it all and turned them to quarreling. Where does a present hardship tempt you to forget all that God has already done and to doubt that He is with you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the mirror on our short memory. Israel had walked through the Red Sea on dry ground and gathered manna that very morning, yet one waterless camp wiped the slate clean and they spoke as if God had done nothing.

Help students see this pattern in themselves. We can experience a clear answer to prayer on Monday and despair over a new trouble on Tuesday as though God had never moved. Present hardship has a way of shrinking our vision down to the immediate problem and erasing the long record of God's faithfulness.

The cure is deliberate remembering. Again and again Scripture calls God's people to remember His works (Psalm 77:11-12; Deuteronomy 8:2). Encourage the class to keep a real, honest memory of how God has provided, so that the next dry place finds them with a stocked storehouse of remembered grace rather than empty hands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- How quickly present hardship erases the memory of past deliverance (Psalm 106:13).
- The shrinking of our spiritual vision down to the immediate trouble.
- Deliberate remembering of God's works as a discipline of faith (Psalm 77:11-12).
- Trusting the God who has already proven faithful, even before the present need is met.

Discussion Prompts

- What recent hardship tempted you to act as though God had never helped you before?
- How can remembering God's past faithfulness steady you in a new trial?
- What is one way you could keep a fuller memory of how God has provided?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 17:5-7. God tells Moses to strike the rock, and water gushes out for the whole nation to drink. Paul later says that the Rock was Christ and that they drank from Him (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). How does this miracle of water from the rock point us to Jesus, the One who gives living water to all who thirst (John 7:37-39)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the first scene, so give it room. God tells Moses to take the staff that struck the Nile and to strike the rock at Horeb, and God Himself says, I will stand before you there on the rock (17:6). Water gushes out, enough for a whole nation. The provision is sheer grace poured out on a grumbling people.

Let Paul interpret it for us. In 1 Corinthians 10:1–4 he says all Israel drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. This is not an over-reading of a small detail; it is inspired apostolic teaching. The water-giving rock in the wilderness was a real picture of the Christ who sustains His people. The God who stood on the rock to give them water was, in His eternal Son, the Rock from whom living water flows.

Carry it forward to Jesus' own words. In John 7:37–39 Jesus stands and cries, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink, and John explains He was speaking of the Spirit given to those who believe. The desert water was always pointing here. Israel had to come to the rock and drink; the thirsty soul must come to Christ and drink.

Be careful and accurate. We teach this typology because the New Testament teaches it, not because we are looking for hidden meanings in every detail. The point is glorious and plain: the One who satisfied Israel's thirst in the wilderness is the same One who satisfies the deepest thirst of every soul today, and His name is Jesus.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's grace giving water from the rock to a grumbling people (Exodus 17:6).
- Paul's inspired teaching that the Rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).
- Jesus as the giver of living water to all who come to Him and drink (John 7:37–39).
- Reading typology as the New Testament authorizes it, not by fanciful over-reading.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Paul help us understand what the rock at Horeb was really pointing to?
- What does it mean that the thirsty must come to Christ and drink, as Israel came to the rock?
- Where in your life are you most aware of a thirst only Jesus can satisfy?

Question 4

Student Question:

Moses named the place Massah (testing) and Meribah (quarreling) so the memory of Israel's failure would not be lost. What hard place in your own walk has tested whether you would trust God or turn on Him, and what did it reveal about your heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns on the names Moses gave the place. He called it Massah and Meribah, testing and quarreling, because there Israel tested the Lord and quarreled (17:7). Naming the place fixed the memory of the failure so it would teach later generations.

Help students name their own Meribah. Every believer has a hard place, a season of loss, fear, or unanswered prayer, where the real question surfaced: will I trust God here, or will I turn on Him? The dry place does not create our heart; it reveals it.

Lead toward honest reflection rather than shame. The goal is not to relive failure but to learn from it, as Israel was meant to. Ask the class to consider what a past hard place revealed about their trust, and how God can use that knowledge to meet the next one with faith instead of bitterness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The naming of Massah and Meribah as a lasting memorial of Israel's failure (Exodus 17:7).
- The hard place as a revealer of what is truly in the heart.
- Learning from past testing rather than merely reliving it.
- Choosing trust over bitterness when life runs dry.

Discussion Prompts

- What hard place in your life has tested whether you would trust God or turn on Him?
- What did that testing reveal about your heart?
- How can what you learned there help you face the next dry place with faith?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 17:8–13. As long as Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed, but when they sank, Amalek prevailed. What does this teach about Israel's true source of victory, and about the dependence of God's people on Him rather than on their own strength and weapons (compare Psalm 20:7; Zechariah 4:6)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Move into the battle with Amalek, the first nation to attack the freed people of God. The strange detail is the key: whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered it, Amalek prevailed (17:11). The outcome on the battlefield tracked with the lifted hands on the hill, not simply with Joshua's swordsmanship.

Teach the lesson of dependence. The lifted hands, holding the staff of God, signified that the victory came from the Lord, not from Israel's strength or weapons. This is a recurring theme of Scripture: some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God (Psalm 20:7); not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord (Zechariah 4:6).

Guard against a magical reading. The point is not that the hands had power in themselves, but that they were a visible confession of utter dependence on God. When the people looked up and saw the staff of God lifted high, they were reminded that their battle belonged to the Lord. Israel still had to fight, Joshua still had to lead the men, but the victory was God's gift, received through dependence.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Victory belonging to the Lord, signified by the lifted staff of God (Exodus 17:11).
- Trusting in God rather than in our own strength and weapons (Psalm 20:7; Zechariah 4:6).
- Human effort and divine dependence working together, not against each other.
- Guarding against treating the lifted hands as magic rather than a confession of dependence.

Discussion Prompts

- What did Moses' lifted hands signify about where Israel's victory came from?
- Where are you tempted to trust your own strength or resources instead of the Lord?
- How do human effort and dependence on God belong together in the Christian life?

Question 6

Student Question:

Moses' arms grew heavy, and he needed Aaron and Hur to hold them up. Are you willing to admit when your hands are sinking, or does pride keep you fighting alone? What would it look like this week to let brothers and sisters hold up your hands in prayer and support?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the humbling fact that Moses, the great deliverer, had arms that grew heavy like anyone's (17:12). He did not pretend to be tireless; he let Aaron and Hur hold his hands up. There is no shame here, only honest human limitation met by the help of others.

Confront the pride that fights alone. Many believers, especially the strong and capable, would rather collapse than admit their hands are sinking. We treat asking for help as weakness, when in truth it is the very design of the body of Christ. Even Moses needed Aaron and Hur.

Make it concrete. Invite the class to name where their arms are tired right now, in a marriage, a grief, a temptation, a long obedience, and to identify who could hold them up if they were willing to ask. The practical step is simple and hard: let someone in.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Even the strongest servant of God has limits and grows weary (Exodus 17:12).
- Pride that would rather fight alone than admit weakness.

- Asking for help as God's design for the body, not a failure.
- Letting brothers and sisters hold up our hands in prayer and support (James 5:16).

Discussion Prompts

- Where are your arms tired right now in your walk with God?
- What keeps you from admitting weakness and asking others for help?
- Who could be an Aaron or Hur to you this week if you let them?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 17:11–13. Aaron and Hur did not fight on the front line; they held up the hands of God's servant, and the victory came through that quiet, persevering help. How does this picture the importance of persevering intercession and of every member of the body helping one another in the Lord's work (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Galatians 6:2)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question lifts up the ministry of Aaron and Hur. They did not fight on the front line or win glory; they put a stone under Moses to sit on, then stood on either side and held up his hands until the sun went down (17:12). The victory came through their quiet, steady, persevering help.

Teach this as a picture of intercession and mutual support. Holding up another's hands is what we do when we pray for one another, encourage one another, and bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11). The work of the kingdom advances not only through those at the front but through the many who hold up the hands of the weary.

Note the perseverance. They held his hands steady until the sun went down (17:12); this was not a momentary lift but sustained, tiring labor. So too persevering intercession and faithful encouragement require staying power. Help the class value the unseen, unglamorous work of holding others up over the long haul, the kind of ministry heaven sees even when no one else does.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unseen ministry of holding up the hands of God's servants (Exodus 17:12).
- Persevering intercession as real work in the kingdom (Colossians 4:12).
- Bearing one another's burdens and building one another up (Galatians 6:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- The body of Christ winning together, not by lone heroes but by mutual support (1 Corinthians 12:21–26).

Discussion Prompts

- How does the picture of Aaron and Hur help us understand intercession and mutual support?
- Why does Scripture honor the unseen helpers as much as those at the front?
- Whose hands is God calling you to hold up in prayer and encouragement right now?

Question 8

Student Question:

Holding up another man's arms from morning until sunset is tiring, unglamorous, unseen work. Where is God calling you to a quiet, behind-the-scenes ministry of support, and are you willing to be an Aaron or a Hur even when no one notices?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question targets the heart that craves the front line and overlooks the quiet supporting role. Aaron and Hur did unglamorous, unseen, tiring work, holding heavy arms aloft from morning until sunset, and the whole victory depended on it.

Help students reckon with their motives. We are often drawn to visible ministry that brings recognition and reluctant about the hidden service that no one applauds. Yet much of the Lord's work, and much of its real power, lies in the supporting roles: prayer, encouragement, practical help, faithful presence.

Press toward willingness. Ask the class where God may be calling them to be an Aaron or a Hur, a behind-the-scenes supporter of others doing the visible work, and whether they are willing to serve there even when no one notices. Remind them that the Lord sees what is done in secret and rewards it (Matthew 6:4).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The value of quiet, behind-the-scenes ministry of support (Matthew 6:4).
- The temptation to prefer visible, recognized roles over hidden service.
- Willingness to serve faithfully even when no one notices.
- God seeing and honoring the unseen labors of His people (Hebrews 6:10).

Discussion Prompts

- Where is God calling you to a quiet, supporting ministry rather than a visible one?
- Why are we often reluctant to serve where no one will notice?
- What would it look like to be content holding up another's hands this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 18:13–23. Jethro warns that Moses cannot carry the whole load alone and urges him to choose able men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate dishonest gain, to share the work of leading and judging the people. How does this God-honoring pattern of shared, qualified leadership among faithful men help us understand the wisdom of a plurality of qualified men sharing the work and oversight in the Lord’s church (compare Acts 6:1–4; 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, so handle it with care and accuracy. Jethro watches Moses sit alone as the single judge for a whole nation from morning till evening (18:13–14) and says plainly, what you are doing is not good; you and the people will wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you; you are not able to do it alone (18:17–18). The diagnosis is clear: one man was carrying what God never intended one man to carry.

Notice the qualifications Jethro names. Moses is to choose able men who fear God, men who are trustworthy and hate a bribe (18:21), and set them over the people to share the judging, bringing only the hardest cases to Moses. The men are chosen by character: capable, God-fearing, honest, and trustworthy. This is leadership shared among qualified, godly men.

Now draw the connection to the church carefully and without overreaching. This chapter does not establish the eldership; that comes later in the New Testament. But the principle it teaches, that God’s work is meant to be shared among a plurality of qualified, God-fearing, trustworthy men, runs straight through Scripture. In Acts 6:1–4 the apostles refuse to let the practical load crush the ministry of the word and appoint qualified men to share it. When elders are appointed, they are appointed as a plurality in each congregation (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5), and they too are chosen by character and qualification (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), men who are above reproach, self-controlled, not greedy for gain, exactly the kind of qualities Jethro named.

Teach the spirit of it, which is humility and shared labor. Moses, the greatest leader Israel ever had, listened to wise counsel and gladly shared the burden rather than guarding it as his own. That same humility marks healthy leadership in the Lord’s church today: men who do not lord it over the flock or try to do everything alone, but share the oversight and the work as God designed, so that both the leaders and the people are sustained.

Be careful not to claim more than the text gives. We are drawing a sound principle, qualified men sharing the work and oversight, not turning Jethro into an elder or reading the full New Testament eldership back into Exodus. The connection is natural and accurate, and that is enough.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- One man cannot rightly carry the whole work of God’s people alone (Exodus 18:17–18).

- Leaders chosen by character: able, God-fearing, trustworthy, hating dishonest gain (Exodus 18:21).
- The wisdom of shared, qualified leadership among faithful men.
- Sharing the load so the ministry of the word can flourish (Acts 6:1–4).
- A plurality of qualified men sharing oversight in the Lord’s church (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).
- Humility to receive wise counsel and to share rather than hoard responsibility.
- Drawing a sound principle without reading the full New Testament eldership back into Exodus.

Discussion Prompts

- What was wrong with Moses trying to judge the whole nation by himself?
- What kind of men did Jethro tell Moses to choose, and how does that compare with the qualifications for elders?
- How does this passage help us value shared, qualified leadership in the Lord’s church?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole passage, from thirst at the rock, to the battle with upheld hands, to the wise sharing of the burden. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through it, whether to drink from Him when you are dry, to let others hold up your hands, or to share the load humbly instead of carrying it all alone.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole passage into one personal response. The lesson has run from thirst at the rock, to victory through upheld hands, to the wise sharing of an impossible burden, and each scene presses toward Christ and toward formation.

Help students name something specific rather than a vague resolve. For one it may be coming to Christ to drink when the soul runs dry instead of grumbling; for another, finally letting brothers and sisters hold up tired hands; for another, laying down the pride that insists on carrying everything alone and learning to share the load.

Point them finally to Jesus. He is the Rock who gives living water, the One who upholds us and gives us a body to lean on, and the Lord who designed His work to be carried together. Close by inviting students to let Him form them through this passage, drinking from Him, leaning on His people, and serving humbly within the shared labor of the church.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Coming to Christ to drink when the soul runs dry rather than grumbling (John 7:37).

- Letting the body of Christ hold up our tired hands (Galatians 6:2).
- Sharing the load humbly instead of carrying everything alone.
- Moving from knowing these accounts to being formed by Christ through them (James 1:22).

Discussion Prompts

- Which scene in this passage speaks most directly to where you are right now?
- What is one specific way you will let Jesus form you through this lesson this week?
- Where do you most need to come and drink, to be held up, or to share the load?