

# Stories of the Hebrew Bible

## Lesson 8: Moses Part 3 – Wandering in the Desert

4.9.2017

---

**Objectives:** Explore trust/covenant as core dimension of our faith.

**Materials:** flipchart, index cards, Moses video.

**Time allotments** suggested and meant to be adapted for **75 minute class**.

---

### 1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
  - ▶ How many of the Ten Commandments, or Decalogue, do you know by heart?
  - ▶ What quality makes someone worthy of your trust?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

### 2. Silly Fun: “If you” (5 minutes max)

Each youth writes an “If you...” question on a card, then places it face down in a center pile. Be creative! (For example, “If you could bring someone back to life, who would it be? If you could win any famous prize, what prize would you want to win? If you could ask God/Cosmos one question to be answered, what would you ask?”) Each person takes a turn picking up a card, reading it aloud, and giving their response. The card is returned to the bottom of the pile before the next person takes a card.

### 3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

**Teacher reads:** (from German scholar and activist, Jan Philipp Reemtsma)

*“Not in violence, but in trust, rests the foundation of true power.”*

### 4. Joys and Sorrows (10 minutes): Listening is a precious gift that we offer one another at church. Using the balance scale and the blue (sorrows) and yellow (joys) stones, invite youth to share a joy and/or a sorrow from the past week, as a way of *meeting* one another with our lives and *sharing* in community. You will want to set limits (e.g. two stones max per person) so that no one monopolizes sharing time.

Each Sunday, a copy of the congregation's Embracing Meditation will be made available to your class, so that stones can be put in for those whose names are being spoken in the Sanctuary.

#### 5. **Where Are We in the Story?** (2 minutes)

**Teacher summarizes:** We left Moses and the Israelites at the parting of the Red Sea. Moses then begins to lead the people through the desert wilderness toward the promised land. God has not yet told Moses where or when the people shall reach it. For weeks they travel and begin to get restless. Zyrac, an outspoken man who doesn't believe in Moses or in his leadership, stirs the people up. Everyone is hungry, tired, and fearful that God has forgotten them, or worse, that God has deceived them.

Moses tries to speak to the people, but to no avail. He then raises his staff in hopes that God will send them another sign; unfortunately, the sign happens to be the instant burning of their tents. Moses, too, wonders if God has turned on the people, and wants to give up his leadership. His brother, Aaron, convinces Moses to keep faith that God has a plan. Moses then prays to God, and tells Aaron to instruct the people, "Go into your tents and do not come out until morning." The Israelites are still angry, but not knowing what else to do, they go into the remaining tents and wait until morning. This next section of the video continues the story from there...

#### 6. **Viewing Video: Manna from heaven**

**Play chapter 18** and stop after the people find meat/quails to eat. (approx 5 minutes)

#### **Questions for Discussion** (5 minutes)

- The Israelites are asked to follow God without a map or clear explanations. They are instructed to eat manna they had gathered for each day and NOT store it up, as it would rot. A gift for a single day, as "each day the Lord will see to your needs." What is the aim or purpose behind all this?

*(Hint: All of these challenges are about the Hebrews becoming a covenanted people. They are learning what it means to trust in God when they are confused, afraid, and desperate – not just in theory but under pressure of actual conditions that threaten their survival.)*

- Do you think the Israelites have a stronger faith in God because God provided manna? *(Hint: The people then ask for meat, and then for water, and then, and then...)*

#### 7. **Synopsis: The Giving of the Law** (2 minutes)

**Teacher Summarizes:** As the Israelites wandered through the desert wilderness, not even manna would finally satisfy the people's grumbling and complaining. There was constant lack of food and water, enemy attacks, impatience for the journey to end, and ongoing complaint about the leadership of Moses and Aaron. The people's trust in God

wavered between the relative security of life back in Egypt and the great uncertainty of life in the wilderness.

God finally instructs Moses to lead the Israelites to Mount Sinai (also called Mount Horeb). Here, the kind of community they would become would be established in the giving of the law. At Mount Sinai, the Decalogue (literally “Ten Sayings,” more commonly known as the Ten Commandments) would bind the Israelites in a sacred covenant with God.

Moses goes up the mountain with Joshua, and instructs the people to have faith and wait for his return. Moses remains on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights. But in his absence, the Israelites decide that something had happened to him, and they demand that Aaron fashion an idol that can provide the reassurance and protection of a god’s presence. They create a golden calf and the people celebrate. (Scholars debate what the calf represented, but images of bulls and calves were common in Near Eastern religions.)

## 8. Viewing Video: Giving of the law

Play chapter 21 and continue on, being careful to stop the video just before scenes of violent conflict: (approx 13 minutes)

**\*\*Important scene to watch for:** The Israelites will break up between those who choose to follow Moses and those who choose to follow Zyrac:

**Zyrac:** *You’re a fool, Moses. We’ll go our own way. There’s nothing you can do about it.*

**Moses:** *Lay them waste!*

**[STOP video here, as next scenes are bit gory and violent.]**

### Questions for Discussion (10 minutes)

- Moses gives the command – “Lay them waste!” – to kill those who choose to follow Zyrac and the golden calf. How does a journey to become a community of trust come to such violence?
- Reconsider the quote read during chalice lighting. Is trust a form of power?
- Without trust, what forms of power do people use to pursue their interests? (Consider: legal-political power, money power, status power, military power, etc.)
- What kind of power is religious faith? (Consider: the word “faith” comes from Latin “fidere” and much older roots meaning “to trust.”)

## 9. Synopsis: The Promised Land (1 minute)

**Teacher Summarizes:** Moses later heads back up the mountain to ask for God’s forgiveness for breaking the tablets in anger, and he returns with another set of stone

tablets. These are wrapped in holy cloth and placed in a golden ark made from the melting down of the calf. This is the Ark of the Covenant (as in “*Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*”) and is housed in the holy tent called the Tabernacle.

Eventually, the Israelites reach the lush land of Canaan, the land that God has promised them. However, the land is already occupied. Moses sends twelve men to scout out the land and the people living there, and to report what they find. The men return after 40 days. This next section of the video continues the story...

#### 10. Viewing Video: The Promised Land

**Play chapter 26** to its end, when scenes of Israelites walking through the desert wilderness fades out, with voice of Moses narrating. (approx 10 minutes)

#### Questions for Discussion (12 minutes)

- Rather than a rosy, glowing portrayal of the Israelites, why does the Hebrew Bible bring attention again and again to all the complaining, grumbling, arguing, and betraying going on in this journey to become a covenanted people? What does it reveal about trust?
- The rabbinic tradition understood the desert wandering as a mutual test: (1) God testing the Israelites to see if they would trust in God, and (2) the people putting God to the test to see if God was trustworthy and reliable. Where did you see God and the Israelites testing their trust in each other?
- We say that UU congregations are “bound not by creed, but by covenant.” What holds UUs together is not doctrine but trust! How is the story of Moses and the journey to become a covenant people of God relevant to UUs today?

#### 11. Say goodbye until next time: Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

*“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

#### 12. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- return blue/yellow stones to containers
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets