

Was Moses an Enneagram 8?

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Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" ³But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do for this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. ⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

(Take out and place various water bottles on the pulpit).

Can we admit that our culture has a water bottle problem? Stanleys, Tervises, Nalgene, Yetis, Owalas... Let me ask you one question – are your kitchen cabinets as overflowing with these vessels as mine? When did our hydration become such an issue? I never recall taking a water bottle to me with school one day between preschool and graduation from high school. I would drink a carton of milk at lunch (or a sweet tea once I got to high school) and depend on the water fountain if I got thirsty between classes. I was a RUNNER in high school, on the track and cross-country teams, and I don't ever recall taking a water bottle to practice or a meet with me. I do occasionally remember big orange coolers with tiny cups we could get a sip from after a workout or during a meet. Now when it was time for college, Nalgene water bottles became all the rage, but that was less about hydration and more about the look of carrying your Nalgene to class and adorning it with stickers to signal your level of coolness. I find myself wondering,

was I just perpetually dehydrated for the first 18 years of my life? Nowadays I get panicky if I don't have my water vessel nearby. And when I go on a trip, I must take one Yeti tumbler for my travel coffee and a large Stanley for my water needs. And the kids! I've been sending my children to school with a water vessel since they were in the toddler class. In fact, since school started this year, I have gotten calls from both of my children to let me know that they had left their water bottle in the car or at home and could I bring it to them? Basically, I'm asking, are we the modern-day Hebrews without the wilderness? Are we just perpetually at risk of dying of thirst or becoming perpetually dehydrated?

Now another cultural phenomenon is brought to mind by this passage, and I hint at it in the sermon title. That cultural phenomenon is the Enneagram. If you aren't familiar with the Enneagram, it is a personality theory that describes nine interconnected personality types. So, you could be a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9. And your number would be determined not based on your personality traits only, but also on your core fears, desires, and motivations. The Enneagram is perhaps a more modern (and practitioners would assert, ancient) take on Myers-Briggs personality assessment so many of us are familiar with. As Beth Mueller simplifies, "The nine personality types of the Enneagram illustrate nine different lenses through which we perceive, experience, and respond to life."¹ For full transparency's sake, I am able to deem that Moses is an 8 because I am an 8 and I see similarities between myself and Moses in this text. An Enneagram 8 is known as "The Challenger," and is motivated by the desire to protect themselves and their loved ones from injustice, control, and vulnerability. They are afraid of not having autonomy, being viewed as weak, or being at the mercy of injustice.

They are often direct with their communication and sometimes have a loud voice.

Let's take a moment to orient ourselves to where Moses finds himself at this precise point in the Exodus narrative. He was a vulnerable child who his family sought to protect by putting him in a basket on the Nile River. He probably never wants to be in a vulnerable position like that again. He was raised in two different households – the Hebrew house of his birth where his mother nursed him until he was of age to move into Pharaoh's house as Pharaoh's daughter's adopted son. He had no autonomy over this unconventional upbringing. As a young adult, his notions of injustice were awakened when he saw a Hebrew slave being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster. When God called to Moses from the burning bush and first gave him this task of leading his people out of slavery, Moses doubted his own voice and his ability to be taken seriously as a leader. But God equipped him

¹ Beth Mueller, Common Sense Guide to the Enneagram, 1.

promising, “I’ll help you speak, I’ll teach you what to do.”² Then, after he was called by God to lead the Hebrews out of the land of slavery, he saw his people further suffer. From fear, hunger, and now thirst, in the wilderness. And Moses is being blamed for it. These are all things an 8 will not stand for. So, he uses that voice God has equipped him with and cries out to God on behalf of the Hebrews (and let’s be honest, on his own behalf as well).

Dr. Carol Newsom’s insights further help orient us to the structure of this particular text. Exodus 17 isn’t dissimilar to other texts we have studied in this sermon series, such as the manna and quail from last week. First, there is a need. In this case, water. The need is followed by a complaint. The people tell Moses in no uncertain terms, “Give us something to drink!” There is then a response by Moses and he cries out to God on their behalf saying, “What shall I do for this people?” **This cry lays the foundation for a miracle by God.** In this case, like many others, Moses and his rod are the conduit for the miracle. God provides water from a rock that the Hebrew people desperately need. The passage ends with a documentation of the miracle by giving the place a specific name – *Massah* and *Meribah*. *Meribah* comes from the root word *rib* meaning “to quarrel.” The people “quarrel” with Moses at the beginning of verse 2. *Massah* comes from the root word *nasa* meaning “to test.” Moses accuses them of “testing the Lord” in the latter half of verse 2. Like Ben pointed out last week, it is easy for us to look at this story and say, “What?! These needy Hebrews are complaining again?! We would never do this in their situation. We would trust God and be patient for his provision.” Carol Newsom puts it plainly for those of us feeling this way. “God has reason to wonder if the people are ready to enter into covenant partnership,” she writes, “but the people have no rational grounds to wonder about their God, who has acted reliably toward them in bringing them out of slavery.”³ They have no rational grounds. But they are human. And so, they will complain. And they will wonder. And they will doubt. Just as we would.

I don’t mean to downplay the need for water in human life with my plethora of vessels. Water, like oxygen, food, and shelter is a basic need. We know this from science. The human body can only go about a week without water. And being in an extremely hot environment, LIKE A DESERT, only promotes faster dehydration. As a 2021 UCLA study on the Physiological costs of undocumented human migration revealed, “A 5-year-old child will probably die first. Then a nonpregnant woman, followed by a grown man and finally a pregnant

² Exodus 3:15

³ Feasting on the Word Year A, Volume 2, 77.

woman. This macabre list isn't some analysis of horror films — it's an all-too-real ranking of how likely migrants are to perish from dehydration and exposure as they traverse the most unforgiving routes through the Sonoran Desert near the Mexico–Arizona border.”⁴ I'm certain that the Hebrews felt close to death while wandering in the Sin desert without water. And from their point of view, the availability of water seemed about as far away from possibility as it gets. They were likely close to death. There are people – children, women, and men – who are close to death at this very moment in our world. From dehydration. They are journeying through the Sonoran Desert or living through a drought in Sudan or without a home in Gaza.

Sheinelle Jones, one of the hosts of NBC's The Today Show, recently returned to work after the death of her 45-year-old husband, Uche, from a glioblastoma. She was frank and open about the journey she and Uche embarked upon when he was first diagnosed and when she ultimately decided to take medical leave from her work when they reached the most perilous part of the journey. Jones, whose Christian faith plays an important role in her life, talked about having many similar feelings to the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness in the book of Exodus. She was angry. She questioned God. She quarreled with God. Like Moses was for the Hebrews, she was for her husband Uche. She was the voice lifting up his anguish, naming his needs. And now that Uche is gone, she talks about the basic needs she experiences. She likens the tears that accompany grief to a cleansing rain. Just like we all need water to survive, she, as a widow, needs to let the grief come so that the cleansing rain can come with it. She says that her community, the friends and family and neighbors who surround her, are the oxygen that fills her lungs and keeps her going. Their love. Their provision. Their care enables her and her children to survive this wilderness of grief.

As people of faith, the basic needs of human life – shelter, air, food, water – can take on double meanings for us. Like the Hebrews, we know what it is to physically be in need of these things. Like the woman at the well from our John reading earlier this morning, we know what it is to be spiritually in need of these things. I believe that our God is a miracle worker. I believe that our God is sitting at the ready to provide for our spiritual and physical needs. But I also believe that we live in a broken world. And sometimes that world gets in the way of each human life having what they need. And we need people like Moses. Who are a voice for the voiceless. Whose cries lay the foundations for miracles. Who believe, with their whole selves, in God's desire and power to provide. Because they have seen it first-hand, again and again.

⁴ [Dying in the desert: How U.S. border policies contribute to migrant mortality | UCLA](#)

In the last book published before her death, the late Rachel Held Evans talked about the power of naming in the Bible. “It’s worth noting,” she wrote, “that at the culmination of nearly every wilderness journey is a naming.”⁵ Naming something also gives us power over it. Naming the place where the Hebrews found water “testing and quarreling” reminds them that God provides what they need and gives them the strength, both physically and spiritually, to continue the journey. Naming the past or a journey that was hard, like the one Sheinelle Jones walked with her beloved spouse, gives her power over it. It helps her derive power from it. Enables her to reframe the tears that come with grief as a cleansing and needed rain. Enneagram 8’s are all about power. But a healthy 8 is about power for not power over. They seek the power to make their own decisions. They seek power on behalf of the marginalized or the oppressed or those suffering at the hands of injustice. That’s what shows up in this passage for me. That’s what I’m taking away. Yes, seeing God provide through a miracle is amazing. We’ve seen that a lot in the Exodus narrative already. What I’m intrigued about and what I think we can take with us into a new week, is the model of Moses the Enneagram 8. Who is brave enough to use the voice God has given him. Who seeks to voice the cries of those in need. Who believes in God’s power and ability to provide. And who lays the foundation for a miracle to turn a situation completely around. Amen and amen.

⁵ Rachel Held Evans, *Inspired*, 50.

