

EXODUS

Lesson 16 - Chapters 18 and 19

Last week we got a little way into Exodus chapter 18, and ended where Moses' father-in-law, Jethro (Yitro in Hebrew) brought Moses' wife and 2 sons to him for a reunion. And, we find that much news had reached Yitro about some of the amazing incidents that had occurred in Israel's flight from Egypt. Yitro, being a pagan priest, naturally accepted that many of these incidents were miraculous in nature and could only have been brought about by the god, or gods, that watched over the Israelites.

Moses and Yitro spent much time together as Moses recounted exactly WHICH god it was and gave Yitro some of the dramatic details of the past several weeks' journey. Yitro was so favorably impressed with Yehoveh that he wanted to make this superior god his own god. In reality, it was less a matter of Yitro giving up all of his old gods and more a matter of accepting Yehoveh as the greatest god.....the god above all gods. The process of accepting Yehoveh involved two specific sacrifices (which we learned were called an 'Olah and a Zevah), and sealing it all with a sacred meal. In essence, Yitro became an Israelite, though it is not at all clear that henceforth Yitro gave up his identity as a Midianite and, rather, thought of himself now as a Hebrew.

Let's re-read the last half of Exodus 18 to get our bearings for this week's lesson.

RE-READ EXODUS 18:13 - end

The day after Yitro's conversion ceremony, Moses was sitting as a judge of the people; that is, he was the arbitrator of disputes. And, apparently he was the ONLY judge, because he had a long line of people waiting to bring their grievances before him; it says the people stood in line from sun-up to sunset. Yitro observed this and at the appropriate time, discussed it with Moses. Now, although typically we remember this incident as being based on Moses being wearied on overworked, in fact Yitro's main concern seemed to be for the people who waited endlessly to stand before Moses. And, it is also made clear in vs. 15, that Moses not only judged peoples legal matters, he was also their spiritual advisor; that is, they came to him to ask him what God wanted them to do in certain situations in their personal lives. Now, this was a good news bad news deal; for it was good that the people were learning to seek out Yehoveh for his direction, but it was bad news in that the people felt they could only approach Yehoveh through Moses. And, indeed, Moses was quickly approaching burnout!

One wonders where Yitro gained such wisdom as to offer Moses the advice that he did; which in essence was to set up a kind of government system, with lower judges and higher judges, and so forth. And, apparently, though its not revealed, God must have agreed with Yitro

because Moses instituted it right away.

Now, the system of organization that was set up sounds very similar to the Greco-Roman system instituted 1000 years into the future: there were to be leaders of 1000's, leaders of 100's, leaders of 50's, and leaders of 10's. For those of us that have been in the military, we understand this system quite well; but for those who haven't been in the military, basically it worked this way: 10 people reported to 1 leader. 5 of these leaders (who, altogether, represented 50 people) reported to a chief of 50. Two of these chiefs (each controlling 50 men plus their leaders) reported to a fellow who controlled 100. 10 of these leaders, each of which controlled 100 men plus their leaders reported to a man who, therefore, was in charge of 1000 men, plus all their leaders.

There are several interesting elements to this matter of Yitro counseling Moses that we shouldn't bypass. First is the matter that credit for the establishment of Israel's justice system is openly given to a non-Israelite. Even more, Yitro was a Midianite; he was part of a confederation of tribes that in a few years the Lord God would order Moses to destroy. Midian would become much like Amalek: people specially marked for destruction due to the trouble they caused God's people.

Second is that this judiciary system that Yitro recommends (and Moses institutes) is purely secular. That is, it is NOT composed of those who will be God's set apart servants from among Israel, the Levites and the Priests. In fact, verse 21 makes it clear that the chosen judges would come from among "all the people". In other words, these would be ordinary citizens, not tribal chiefs or princes, and not elders. The existing hierarchy of tribe and clan chiefs and heads would be set aside in favor of people chosen for their wisdom and uprightness regardless of their social status. Let me state right here, however, that politics and power have always played a role in men's affairs since there were enough people for there to BE clans and tribes. So, I have no doubt that the selection process was not as pure as it should have been and there was likely some rather severe behind-the-scenes arm twisting that certain men be omitted and others included as judges.

Third, this secular judiciary....although validated by the Lord.....was not ORDAINED by the Lord. Yehoveh did NOT tell Moses to set up a judiciary, let alone tell him HOW to go about it. This was a HUMAN institution. Now, I think we can safely say that God's providence played a central role in it's establishment and the selection of men, but there is a rather large and revolutionary (in Middle Eastern terms) democracy component here whereby the PEOPLE choose who they want to be their judges.

Fourth, this judiciary is to convene on a regular basis. This is not a committee whereby meetings will happen as needed, and the judges will be re-selected each time. In a community of 3 million, there will be many disputes to be resolved every day.

The bottom line here is that even before Israel received the Law, they were pretty well organized; instructions and commands could have been disseminated very rapidly to the people, and every day disputes handled quickly.

What we also are reminded from this is that Yehoveh is a God of order and structure, not of chaos and randomness. From the beginning of our studies, I have asked you to take special note of the various God-patterns, and types, and shadows, and systems we see in the Torah, because those are not one-time-only devices; they will be around at least until Jesus comes, and many which still apply, for all eternity.

God was showing Moses and Israel that His laws and rules and structures could be counted on, depended on, and trusted. These commands were not whimsical, nor did they change according to God's mood. They could know God, and to the extent a human mind can comprehend the ways of the Eternal God of the Universe, they could understand God. What that means for us is that the order and method and reasoning God used in Biblical times and in establishing the Torah is still in force today and as we see end-times prophetic events unveiled in the future. I find that very comforting. Yehoveh wants His people to be reassured, not anxious.

At the end of Chapter 18, it is made clear, once and for all, that as long as Moses is alive, he is the final authority in all matters. Of course, this had been stated for our understanding early in Exodus when we're told that when Moses speaks it, it's as if God speaks it. It is no wonder that Moses is held in such tremendous honor and esteem by the Jewish people; as Christians, we should acknowledge Moses' special place in God's eyes as well.

Yitro is now given leave to return home to his land, Midian; probably a very short distance away.

This ends the 2nd of the 6 divisions of Exodus, and with Chapter 19 we enter the 3rd division: Covenant and Law.

READ CHAPTER 19 all

As we enter this 3rd section of Exodus, the one I call Covenant and Law, it is the 3rd month of the Israelites journey out of Egypt.....or as it was called in Hebrew, Mitzrayim. Ahead of them lay a meeting with God that would change not only their own existence and identity, but would bring a new dynamic to the whole world. Because, Yehoveh was bringing Israel out of Egypt in order to meet with Him on Holy Ground.....the Mountain of God... for the purpose of establishing a new relationship with the offspring of Jacob.

Yehoveh had been preparing Israel for hundreds of years, step by step, for this momentous event. He had created a separate people through Jacob, allowed them to wander in a land that was not theirs, then to sojourn and become an enormous nation in another land that eventually enslaved them, and finally He rescued them from the hand of their oppressors. He let them witness great miracles; He demonstrated through the disastrous strokes against Egypt (which did not harm the Hebrews), that Israel was a set-apart people....or as the Bible puts it, God makes a **distinction** between Israel and everyone else. Yehoveh PERSONALLY led Israel by means of His visible presence through the desert wilderness; He fed them and gave them water through supernatural means, and He fought for them and defeated their enemy, Amalek, in battle.

As a result of all that God had done for them, had Israel really changed very much in the 3 months since leaving Egypt? Yes and no. Yes, in that they were now fully aware that the power of Yehoveh had no bounds, and that Moses was His chosen man to lead Israel, and they now held a healthy FEAR of Yehoveh. No, in that their FAITH in Yehoveh was still miniscule, they still didn't understand that Yehoveh was NOT just the only God of Israel, but was the only god, period, nor did they even remotely grasp the HOLINESS of El Shaddai....The God Most High.

The Lord God was about to form an unprecedented relationship between a god and men; a covenant relationship. The first covenant God constructed was far more a **promise** than a covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant was a promise to Abraham that his descendants would be many, and that the Lord Himself would provide an already decided upon land for these descendants to live, and that through these descendants every family on earth could be blessed. Abraham had no obligations. What the Lord would do had nothing to do with Abraham's behavior or actions.

The covenant the Lord was about to make at Mt. Sinai was fundamentally different than the Abrahamic Covenant: the people of Israel had obligations to perform. How God would respond depended on how Israel behaved.

Now, covenants were a very normal and everyday way (in that era) of either two people of equal power that would make an agreement that was mutually beneficial; or the covenant was of the Suzerain kind in which a king would make an agreement with his subjects; that is it was the establishment of a relationship between UN-equals....one was a man of power, the other side were under his control. His subjects could be a few hundred people who formed his kingdom, or in the case of an Empire Builder, it could consist of entire nations that he controlled.

So, while we use the term "covenant" when speaking of the promise from God to Abraham, and of the oracle given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, they are covenant-like but they don't precisely fit the standard covenant purposes or terms of those ancient times.

Further, that a god would form a covenant-like relationship with a group of people was an entirely new phenomenon. It was, and remains, unique among all known religion-based cultures. So, what we'll find is that it is not that many of the Laws that Yehoveh will ordain through Moses are new and strange to the ears of the Hebrews (most of the laws and commands God would give were familiar and had parallels in other Middle Eastern societies), its that the RELATIONSHIP of the Hebrew God to the Hebrew people.....a covenant-like relationship..... had no parallel.

And, now, in vs. 2, Israel has arrived at the foot of the Holy Mountain; and Moses began to ascend it, surely climbing towards the same spot where he had met God, in the form of a burning bush, going on 2 years earlier. No time was wasted; immediately Yehoveh tells Moses that He has a message for the people of Jacob, of Israel, and it is this:

First, you are not here because of ANYTHING you did. I smote the Egyptians for your sake, I carried you to this spot, and now I bring you to Myself, because I chose to do it.

Second, IF.....IF..... you will hear, accept, and follow the New Covenant I am about to give you, then you will become My own possession, my own precious treasure.

Third, IF.... IF..... you follow this New Covenant, then God will consider you a kingdom of priests, and a sanctified, HOLY group of people.

Notice I said “New Covenant”. This covenant, what we generally term “The Law” or the Mosaic Covenant, was indeed going to be a **new** covenant. The covenant Israel was operating under at that moment was the Abrahamic covenant. That covenant promised them their own special land, and that they would grow into enormous numbers; that through them the whole world would be blessed, and Israel would be exceedingly fruitful. This new covenant they were about to receive certainly was not meant to abolish the older covenant, was it? The covenant on Mt. Sinai did not REPLACE the covenant God had made with Abraham, about 600 years earlier. God didn’t say, “in place of giving you a promise for a land of your own, I’m going to give you My Law”. The newer covenant the Hebrews were about to receive was for a **different purpose** than the older one. These 2 covenants were to be complementary, working hand-in-glove.

This is one reason I really dislike applying the term “New Covenant” to the covenant that is Yeshua HaMashiach. For in our gentile mindset we have this picture that once we have a new covenant, then the older one or ones become obsolete, abolished, replaced. Not true. Certainly as regards the Covenant that is Christ, in a sense, some elements of the earlier covenants were **transformed** from being but shadows or types of a future reality, into the higher essence they were always pointing to. For instance, the sacrificial system using animal blood to atone for sin (that actually began with Adam and Eve), would be transformed into its fullest essence with Yeshua; His blood being the real blood that had been pointed to by the animal sacrifices; and therefore, the sacrifice of Yeshua was the last and final sacrifice for atonement of sins that would ever be needed. The Sacrificial system didn’t end, and it didn’t really CHANGE..... rather it was transformed; blood of an innocent was still required to atone for sin. So, each time we, in faith, count on the blood of Christ as already having atoned for our sins, we are fulfilling the point and purpose and spirit of the sacrificial system.

Yet, in another sense, each of God’s covenants, at the time they were given, were fully developed and fully established for the Divine purpose that Yehoveh created them. We buy new models of computers and cars because the new models have features and capabilities that older models don’t. Because as our knowledge and technology advances we are able to make the things we create better, more useful, more complete. This is man’s way. This is NOT the way with God’s covenants. God did not create a primitive, low-tech covenant with Abraham and then create a more advanced, next generation covenant with more features in the Mosaic Covenant, and then as God’s vision and capabilities grew, an even zippier covenant with ALL the bells and whistles in the New Covenant that is Christ. Each and every one of these covenants were created, and remain, perfect and intact for the purpose God intends for each of them.

Oh, certainly, some parts of each of the covenants are aging, as Paul says in Hebrews 8:13. Because as time goes on, more of the terms of each covenant get closer to their complete

fulfillment; that is, the older the covenant, the more of the terms that have been fulfilled and the fewer that are left to BE fulfilled. For instance, in the Abrahamic Covenant, Israel was promised a land of their own and now they have it (never to be ejected from it again, by the way). And, Abraham's descendents have indeed blessed the gentile world as well as the Hebrew world. In the Mosaic Covenant the purpose of the sacrificial system has been brought to fruition in Yeshua's death. But, the purpose of Law in showing men what God's principles and attributes and morals are, and what pleases and displeases Him will go on until at least the Millennial Kingdom (how else will we know what God's definition of sin is?). Even the Newest Covenant has items that have been checked off: the son of King David (the Messiah Jesus) has already come and gone and atoned for our sin. So, does that mean that the New Covenant is now obsolete, just because it is 2000 years old and some of its terms are fulfilled? Of course not. The Abrahamic Covenant is the furthest along the path of having all of it's terms completely fulfilled, the Mosaic Covenant has many elements fulfilled but about has many left to be fulfilled, and the New Covenant has some elements fulfilled but much more left to be accomplished (such as Christ's return, the salvation of all Israel, the destruction of Armageddon, setting up the Millennial Kingdom).

All 3 covenants are needed, they are all still valid, and it's just that some are closer to having every last element of its purpose completed than the others.

Let me give you a very short analogy and we'll move on. When you build a house, it has several basic components: you start with ground preparation, then a cement slab, the framed walls, then a roof, and then siding, drywall, etc. Now, if you prepare the ground and pour the slab and complete that portion of the job, does that mean that at that point the slab and it's purpose is dead and gone? That the slab is now, somehow, obsolete just because it's use and purpose has been mostly completed in the order of building a house? Of course not. The entire house must be now built on that slab that has been readied to carry the load that will be built upon it. Dissolve the slab, and there is no way to build and complete the house. It's that way with God's covenants...they **were** all necessary and they are all **still** necessary.

In vs. 7 Moses, who was instructed to take this message from Yehoveh to the people, assembles the people's representatives, the elders, and tells them what God said. Don't think for a minute that all the 3 million Israelites were gathered to a spot to hear Moses speak... Moses didn't have a giant goatskin megaphone allowing every last person to hear his voice. We would do well to understand that between vs. 7., where the elders were gathered to Moses, and vs.. 8 where "the people" responded 'that they would do all that Yehoveh instructed', some time passed. A few days, I suspect, because the elders would have gone back to their people after their initial meeting with Moses, each according to his tribe, and told group leaders under them what God had said, and those leaders would have told smaller groups, until each person had heard God's words and responded. Then, they would have gone back up the chain of command, until it reached Moses with their answer that the people of Israel, by their own choice, stood ready to obey Yehoveh.

Here we have seen another important God pattern established. First, God makes us aware of His presence. Second, He asks the question: will you listen, obey and follow Me? Third, if we respond yes, then He enters into a relationship with us and begins to acquaint us with His will

for our lives. If we respond no, the conversation is over... maybe just for now, but maybe forever. So, before God gave Moses and Israel His will for them, through the Mosaic Covenant, He first told Moses to go to the people, and based on what little they knew of God to this point, ask them if they will listen and obey. Since they said, "YES" to God, He would now lay out His will for them.

It's the same procedure for us with Christ: we're made aware of His presence, then follows His offer to be our Lord, and IF by our own choice we respond with a "yes", He enters into relationship with us and guides us according to the Father's will.

Why would anyone think that the principle for entering into a relationship with Yehoveh would be different for us today, than it was for Israel, at Mt. Sinai, a mere 3400 years ago? Time is irrelevant to God. Is this not the eternal, unchanging God we are dealing with, here? God didn't set up these Divine patterns and plans, enact them and record them in the Torah just to change everything up on us at a later time. Though, to listen to some Christian leaders and teachers you would think that is EXACTLY what He did; a bait and switch, or He gave Mankind a defective and inferior offer, and then replaced it with a better one at a later date. If that is the character of Yehoveh, then He can also rescind and abolish the covenant that is Christ, can He not? And where would that leave us? Thankfully, that is NOT the case, but its time the Church realized that; and realized that the Torah, and the OT, carries just as much weight as it always had. We've reviewed in this class, over and over, that Yeshua Himself taught that NO element, not the slightest, had been removed from the Torah with His advent, and that those who taught that some elements HAD been removed were to be considered WHAT in the kingdom of Heaven? LEAST!! And, those who taught that God's word, ALL of it, remains as long as heaven and earth exist will be WHAT in the kingdom of Heaven? GREATEST!! So, let's follow Christ's directive and get back to Torah and rediscover so many teachings and aspects of God that have been thrown out and replaced with manmade doctrines over the centuries.

In vs. 9, after Moses went back to God with the people's response that they would listen and obey, Yehoveh told Moses that He would come to him in a thick cloud on the mountain, AND, then when He spoke to Moses the people would ALSO hear His voice. Why did God want everyone to hear Him? So that they would believe Moses. God knew these people well. He knows US well. Despite all that Yehoveh had done through Moses, He knew the people would be skeptical of the laws and commands Moses would present to them if they didn't actually hear them from God's mouth themselves.

Now, before God would give them His commands and teachings, He instructed Moses that the people were to be cleansed. They were to purify themselves and their clothes, by washing with water. And, on the third day after the purification process begins, THEN God will come to them.

Now, even with their purification, they cannot come into God's dwelling place: the Holy Mountain, the Mountain of God...Mt. Sinai. Yehoveh instructed Moses they were to build a border, a fence if you would, as a demarcation between the desert floor, and that which is considered to be the mountain.

Here we get the God principle that there is a barrier between God and Man.....between Earth and Heaven. That where God dwells is so holy and so pure, that corrupted mankind is not able to stand in the absolute purity of Heaven without being fully cleansed. And, notice, that despite the outward cleansing the Israelites performed, washing themselves and their garments, it was not enough to cross that fence, that barrier at the bottom of the mountain, and stand on Holy Ground. You see, while the ritual washing they were instructed to perform was **symbolic** of internal, spiritual cleansing; in fact, it was still only an external cleansing. The washing they did was not ABLE to purify them spiritually; it simply a lesson, a teaching, the accomplishment of which pointed towards the only way mankind could EVER be spiritually purified: and that was to be washed in the blood of Christ.

So, even AFTER they had washed themselves with water, they were not allowed to cross the barrier, not even to touch the mountain-side, the Holy side, of the fence, upon pain of death.... this, of course, even applied to the animals. So, you can bet that this extensive wall they built was high enough to pen in sheep and goats, which like to jump up and over such things. These were valuable animals and they didn't want to lose them to God's judgment.

Now, it doesn't take a Bible Scholar to figure out that such a fence would have been made out of the only thing available to make a fence from where they were located: stones. And, in fact, the remnants of that fence-wall have, apparently, been found.

God told Moses that at the appropriate moment, He would sound a trumpet, and call Moses and the people to approach the borders of the mountain... but, staying behind the fence....and then He would become visible in the form of a thick dark cloud ringing the summit of Mt. Sinai.

Can you imagine the apprehension of the people? I think the air would have been thick with anxiety and expectation as the 3rd day approached; the people were about to see another side of Yehoveh that, up to now, they apparently had not. Suddenly, the cloud forms; lightening lights up a daytime sky, and thunder causes the very ground they stand on to vibrate and resonate with the rhythm of the thunderclaps. When it seems as though they can stand no more, a ram's horn, a Shofar, is sounded from atop the mountain, the note echoing off the rock walls of the valley below so loudly that it terrified the Israelites.

Then, smoke began billowing up from the top of the mountain.....smoke like from a furnace. And, then the mountain physically shook under the stress of bearing the weight of our awesome God.

As the thunder and the lightening and the sound of the Shofar built to a deafening crescendo, Moses speaks to God Almighty, and Yehoveh answers back.....not in code.....not in rumblings or noises.... Rather, we are told, by voice.....a voice that all the people heard and understood. But, what the voice said was that Moses, by himself, should now ascend the mountain, and stand before God. And, Moses went up.

Now, after all this build-up, the stay at the top was terribly brief; God immediately tells Moses to go back down and warn the people not to cross over the fence, the boundary of the mountain, lest they die. He also tells Moses to warn the priests that they had better properly sanctify themselves just as the people had, or that God would punish them.

Apparently, the all-knowing God knew that many of the Hebrews had an inclination to disregard parts of God's instructions about the barrier, and were planning on jumping the fence. And, Moses, says, "Oh, God, they'd NEVER do that, after all, they're the ones who erected the border, the fence, you commanded!". God says, just go and tell them again. And, BTW, bring Aharon with you when you come back. Now, we see another God principle being set up that will come into play upon the building of the Wilderness Tabernacle, and then its transfer to the Temple: ONLY the High Priest, in this case, Aharon, may enter into God's Holiest Place; and that ONLY upon God's command. No lesser priest may do so. Notice also what a special category Moses must be in, in God's eyes. Because Moses was able to come and go, standing on Holy Ground, seeing into God's face. Moses was higher than a High Priest.

Let me make a quick comment about the term "Priest" as it is used here; as of this point there was no Levitical Priesthood. So, who are these people called "priests". They are the first born of Israel; the first born sons of ancient Middle Eastern cultures tended to carry out priest-like duties, such as having the honor of sacrificing to their gods and leading the family in religious rituals and rites. This was soon going to change, as Yehoveh would establish a wholly separate priesthood and that function of the firstborn would end.

Chapter 19 ends with Moses trekking back down the mountain and once again telling the people, and the Levites (the priest tribe), God's warning and command to **STAY OFF HIS MOUNTAIN!**