

Exodus, Part 11

In our last session, we saw Israel face another test, this time a lack of water. They were camped at Rephidim which was near Mount Sinai. There the children of Israel “quarreled” with Moses and Aaron concerning their leadership and allowing them to get into this dire situation. In reality, their dispute was with God the true leader of this complaining bunch. Israel wanted water and they wanted it NOW. And God provided. He sent Moses and some elders from the camp to Mount Horeb. There he was to strike the rock and water would gush forth. And he did as told and water did come forth to satisfy the thirst of the Israelites. This incident will be repeated later when they depart Mount Sinai and will play out differently.

Then we saw the Amalekites attack the camp and Moses raised an army under the command of Joshua to go out and defend the camp. Moses, Aaron, and Hur remained on a hill overlooking the battle. As long as Moses stood with his arms raised above his head and with his rod in his hand, the Israelites would be winning the battle. When he dropped his arms due to fatigue, the battle shifted to the Amalekites. Aaron and Hur arranged a rock for Moses to sit on and they held up his arms all day and into the night so that the Israelites defeated the Amalekites. Chapter 17 in verse 16 closed with the Lord declaring He “will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” They will always be an issue for Israel and God but their ultimate destruction is assured (Exodus 17:14).

Jethro Comes to Visit

Exodus 18:1 Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses’ father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt. ² Now Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, had taken Zipporah, Moses’ wife, after he had sent her home, ³ along with her two sons. The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land”), ⁴ and the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, “The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh”). 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. ⁶ And when he sent word to Moses, “I, your

father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her,”

Here we see Moses’ father-in-law Jethro return to the story along with Moses’ wife Zipporah and his two sons Gershom and Eliezer. We are reminded of the meanings of the names of the two boys as Gershom meaning “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land” referring to his time in Egypt and then specifically among the Midianites while seeking refuge from Pharaoh because he had killed an Egyptian taskmaster attacking a Hebrew. The name of the younger son Eliezer’s meant “the God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh. Zipporah and the two boys had been sent back to Jethro when she complained of the “bloody” process of circumcision back in Exodus 4:25-26.

Jethro had heard of the experiences of the Israelites in their deliverance from Pharaoh’s slavery, their journey through the wilderness, and in particular the miracles that God had performed on their behalf.

Exodus 18:7 Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent. ⁸ Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. 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.

¹⁰ Jethro said, “Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹ Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.” ¹² And Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God.

Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, wife, and kids. Notice how the passage mentions Moses greeting and kissing Jethro but not Zipporah or the two boys. It is from this “argument from silence” that some expositors

conclude that they did not have a good marriage. Maybe yes and maybe no, but this proves neither.

Moses expounds on all that has happened relating to the exodus of the Israelites and “all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the Lord had delivered them,” some of which Jethro surely had not heard about.

In verses 10-12, we see Jethro respond positively to Moses’ story. In verse 10, he says, “Blessed be the Lord” and in verse 11, he says “the Lord is greater than all gods.” Then in verse 12, we see that Jethro “brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God.” This is taken to indicate that Jethro has become a believer in the God of the Israelites. He was called a “priest of the Midianites” before meaning a priest of the false gods of the Midianites. The scene is one of jubilant praise and fellowship, but Jethro’s true spiritual condition is not explicitly stated. He returned to Midian (v. 27), either as a convert to the true God or perhaps continuing as a priest for the idolatrous Midianites. His later words to Moses seem to suggest that he now feared God (“may God be with you,” v. 19; “select ... men who fear God,” v. 21; “God so commands,” v. 23). I believe it is likely, based on his statements and actions, that Jethro is indeed a believer.

Exodus 18:13 The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. ¹⁴ When Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, “What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?” ¹⁵ And Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God; ¹⁶ when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws.” ¹⁷ 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.”

As the elder leader of this group, Moses would settle disputes and act as a legal judge for civil and criminal matters. “I make them know the statutes of God and his laws” (v. 16). Because Moses was doing this alone for some 2 million people, the wait to be heard could be quite long which verse 14 describes as “from morning till evening,” but could have been significantly longer.

Jethro took note of this and told Moses the way he was handling this was a problem. He told Moses, “What you are doing is not good,” and it will certainly exhaust him and the people. Jethro had a solution and suggested that Moses appoint elders from the various tribes to hear the lesser disputes while the more important issues would be brought to him for judgment. Jethro proposed that this would make life easier for Moses and the people.

What is wrong with this suggestion? That is a subject of debate with some siding with the idea that the solution came from man (Jethro) and not God. Some argue that this is the wisdom of the world and as such, it was impugning the wisdom, judgment, and love of God, and He wasn't being considerate of His children.

But this advice Jethro had for his son-in-law was sound. Moses, of course, should remain the representative of the people before God. He must teach them God's decrees and laws and show them the duties which they should perform. Moses, however, should appoint subordinate judges over groups of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. They would settle disputes while the more difficult cases would still be brought to Moses.

The appointees should possess three qualifications: they should (1) fear God, (2) be trustworthy men, and (3) hate dishonest gain. Jethro concluded

that there would be two positive benefits from this arrangement. First, the people would be better satisfied; and second, Moses would be able to stand the strain of his office.

Jethro elected to return to his own country, but apparently, Zipporah and the children stayed with Moses. Moses sent his father-in-law on his journey by traveling a short distance with him (18:27).

Exodus 18:24 So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. ²⁵ Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. ²⁶ And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. ²⁷ Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.

Moses accepted the wise counsel of Jethro, but the plan was not immediately implemented. According to Deuteronomy 1:9–15 judges were selected after the Law was given on Sinai a few weeks later.

Mount Sinai

The children of Israel travel a short distance from Horeb to arrive at Mount Sinai. As previously discussed, the exact location of Mount Sinai is unknown as are most of the waypoints of the travels of the Israelites in the wilderness. The traditional location for Mount Sinai is in one of two places at the southeastern end of the Sinai Peninsula. Another, with strong supporting evidence, is on the eastern side of the Sea of Aqaba in western Arabia at a mountain called Jamal Magla. The split rock where it is said that Moses struck it so it would give water is not far away from Jamal Magla.

Chapters 19-24 deal with the Law. At Mount Sinai, the children of Israel agree to accept the Law. What they do is exchange grace for the Law.

The Law, also called the Mosaic Covenant, is a covenant or an agreement that Israel made with God. There are two kinds of covenants in Scripture. One is an unconditional covenant in which one party, in this case, God, is the only party bound by the agreement. The second party, in this case, Israel, has no covenantal responsibilities to meet in order to satisfy the

terms of the covenant. The fulfillment of an unconditional covenant is entirely based on the sacred “I will” as stated by God. God says He will bring something to pass. The covenanted people need only to be present at the time the covenant is fulfilled to receive its blessings.

On the other hand, we have “conditional covenants” in which both parties have obligations to meet under the terms of the covenant. This is best summed up as an “if/then” situation. *If* one party meets some obligation stated in the terms of the covenant, *then* the other party is obligated to respond according to those terms. The Law (Mosaic Covenant) is a conditional covenant. God gave Israel certain rules and obligations it was to meet. *If* they satisfied these rules and obligations, *then* they would receive blessings from God. *If*, however, they did not satisfy the terms, *then* they would not receive blessings but would instead receive discipline from God.

When I stated above that Israel exchanged grace for the Law, what I meant was grace is like an unconditional covenant. God bestows grace even though man does not earn or deserve it. The Law was not grace but a system of works whereby man must earn and deserve any blessings from God.

Up to this point, God had been dealing with Israel on the basis of grace. All that He had done for Israel was unearned and undeserved. As we shall see, God made them an offer. They could remain under grace or come under a works system, the Law. They arrogantly chose the latter.

God does not save by the Law; He saves by grace. What a contrast there is between the Law and grace.

- Law Demands – Grace gives
- Law says “do” – Grace says “believe”
- Law “exacts” – Grace bestows
- Law says “work” – Grace says “rest”
- Law threatens, pronouncing a curse – Grace entreats, pronouncing a blessing
- Law says, “Do and you shall live” – Grace says, “Live and you shall do.”
- Law condemns the best of men – Grace saves the worst of men

The Law reveals the character of God and the weakness of man.

Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The Law was never given as a means of salvation. Nowhere in Scripture is it even suggested that anyone can be saved by keeping the Law. Why then was the law given?

Galatians 3:19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made ...

The Law was given to reveal that we were sinners. It was temporary until the “offspring” would come. In some translations “offspring” is translated as “seed”. That “offspring” is of course our Lord Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman.

Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Paul goes on to say in Galatians,

Galatians 3:24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

The word translated as “guardian” is the Greek word *paidagagos* which means “child conductor” and may be better translated as “schoolmaster”. The term was used for a loyal slave in the household of wealthy families. The *paidagagos* had the responsibility of taking care of the children including teaching them manners and disciplining them when necessary, all to prepare them for adulthood. The Law takes us by the hand and leads us to the Cross then spiritual maturity..

The Law ...

1. Revealed God's glory and holiness (Dt 5:22–28)
2. Revealed to man his sinfulness and inability to meet the terms of the covenant by human effort (Rom 7:7, 13; 8:3; 1 Tim 1:9ff.)
3. Marked Israel as God's chosen people (Ps 147:19f.; Eph 2:11ff.)
4. Gave Israel a Godly standard by which they might continue to inhabit Canaan (Dt 5:29ff., Judg 2:19–21)
5. Prepared Israel for the coming of the Promised Seed (Gal 3:24)
6. Illustrated the person and work of Christ in its various forms and ceremonies (Heb 10:1).

Exodus 19:1 On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ² They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain,

Exactly three months after the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites camped by Mount Sinai where they remained throughout the rest of the events recorded in Exodus 19:1–Numbers 10:10. The term “wilderness” (“desert” in some translations) does not always mean a dry wasteland but sometimes uninhabited grazing country. As stated above, the exact location of Mount Sinai is unknown but is likely in western Arabia not far from the Gulf of Aqaba.

Exodus 19:3 while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

With the Israelites camped by Mount Sinai, Moses went up the mountain where God spoke to him about the pact He would ratify with the people. God spoke and Moses listened. The Lord directed Moses to first take a

challenge back to his people. The basis of that challenge is set forth in 19:4. God reminds Moses that it was His power (“what I did to the Egyptians”) that delivered them out of bondage in Egypt. Then God says it was His protection (“I bore you on eagle’s wings”) that kept them safe and provided for their needs during the last three months. And lastly, God says it was His patience (“brought you to myself”) that He remained faithful to them despite their grumbling and failures.

God set forth a twofold condition to the challenge and a three-fold promise. Israel must:

1. Obey God’s voice
2. Keep God’s covenant.

If they met this challenge they would be:

1. God’s special possession
2. A kingdom of priests
3. A holy nation.

These words are considered by some to be the center and theme of the entire Pentateuch.

Exodus 19:7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. ⁸ All the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord.

Moses reported back to the people concerning the deal God was offering to Israel. Under this conditional covenant, both God and Israel would have responsibilities: Israel must obey God’s voice and keep God’s covenant, and God would bless them. Never did the Israelites ask for details on what that meant. They agreed to the covenant without even knowing what it entailed. They assumed they would be able to meet the terms of the covenant and readily replied, “No problemo! Bring it on!” And then for the next 1500 years, they proceeded to prove they could not keep the Law. It was given to control the old sin nature but it could not because the sin nature is fleshly and revolutionary. It cannot be controlled by human effort alone; such would take the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God

You and I have a sin nature. It is at war with the Spirit and its focus is on the flesh. It can never be obedient to God and can never please Him. An understanding of this simple fact, that you are a sinner and constantly failed miserably with your attempts to please God is probably what brought many of you to a saving knowledge of Christ. It did for me. That is exactly the main purpose of the Law – to reveal God's perfect righteousness and your total lack of same. There is no greater hypocrite than the one who says he keeps the Law.

Moses then reported back to God what the people had said.

The giving of the Law to the nation Israel (and it was given to the whole nation – believer and unbeliever alike) was the beginning of a new dispensation, the Dispensation of the Law also called the Age of Israel. It marks a distinct change in how God will deal with those who are His – through the Law rather than grace. This dispensation begins with the giving of the Law and extends to the Cross where it will be interrupted on Pentecost by a new Dispensation called the Age of Grace or the Church Age. That dispensation will be terminated by the Rapture of the Church, and the last seven years of the Age of Israel or Age of the Law will resume. We know that period as the Tribulation.

Exodus 19:9 And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever." ...

When Moses told the words of the people to the Lord, ¹⁰ the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments ¹¹ and be ready for the third day. For on the third day, the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹² And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. ¹³ No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.'

When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.”¹⁴ So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments.¹⁵ And he said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.”¹⁶ On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

After Moses returned to the mount with the answer of the people, the Lord indicated that when he spoke to Moses a thick cloud would come down upon the mount. The glory of God was thus concealed so that the people could come close enough to be able to hear his voice when he spoke with Moses on the mountain. God spoke to Moses within earshot of the people so that He might underscore the authority of His servant.

Moses returned immediately to the people and spent the next two days consecrating them for the descent of God on Sinai. Israel’s response to God’s first word at Sinai was verbal; their response to his second word was to be concrete action. They would symbolize their consecration by (1) washing their clothes; (2) abstaining from sexual relations for those three days; and (3) restricting their movements. The mount was to be off-limits. Any who came near the mount, even animals, were to be stoned or shot through with arrows.

The God of the heavens was about to make a covenant with His people. Unlike pagan deities who supposedly dwelt *in* the mountains, the God of Israel descended from heaven *to* the mountains to converse with His people. Only when summoned by the blast of a ram’s horn were the people to go toward the mountain.

Exodus 19:17 Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.¹⁸ Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.¹⁹ And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.²⁰ The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

²¹ And the Lord said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to look and many of them perish. ²² Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them.” ²³ And Moses said to the Lord, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, ‘Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.’ ” ²⁴ And the Lord said to him, “Go down and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break out against them.” ²⁵ So Moses went down to the people and told them.

On the third day of preparation, the God of Heaven descended to Sinai in a display of power and majesty. God demonstrated His holiness and awesomeness; little wonder that the people trembled, standing at the foot of the mountain. The people heard crashing thunder and a very loud trumpet blast; they saw flashing lightning, fire, and dense billowing smoke as from a smelting furnace; and they felt the mountain trembling in a violent earthquake. The “black cloud” of smoke brought “darkness” in the daytime.

The Lord directed Moses to bring Aaron into the mount. Once again he warned Moses that no one, priest or people, should attempt to come up to the Lord. Mount Sinai had become a holy of holies into which only Moses and Aaron, the future high priest, might enter. The “priests” here are either (1) the firstborn who were already consecrated to God; or (2) the priests designates, the sons of Aaron. Moses returned to the camp and told the people what the Lord had said (19:24–25).

Moses made three trips to the mountaintop and back. These instructions vividly reminded the people of the immeasurable chasm between the divine and the human, as well as the miracle of divine revelation.

In our next session, we will see the giving of the Ten Commandments