

EXODUS

Lesson 15 - Chapters 17 and 18

As we leave behind the establishment of a daily food supply for the Israelites, something called Man hu (meaning “what is it?”), let’s move in to Exodus chapter 17.

READ EXODUS CHAPTER 17 all

As the 17th chapter of Exodus opens, we have the Israelites leaving the Seer Desert, and moving on towards Mt. Sinai, also known as Mt. Horeb, also known as the Mountain of God. One wonders if they had understood the significance of the occurrences of the last several weeks, or had any inkling that God was in the process of molding and shaping them. Is it possible that the miracles of the plagues against Egypt, the Hebrew’s release from bondage, the parting of the Red Sea, and the turning of the bitter waters of Mara into sweet drinkable water, could be so easily dismissed and forgotten in just a few days; their faith going up and down like an elevator? How could it be that the visible cloud that led the way both day and night, God’s actual and real presence before them, wasn’t enough to assure them at all times that God was in control?

But, such was the case with this weak, quarrelsome, insecure people. Let’s hope it is not so with us, as well. Once again, they needed water. They were human, and they were in a barren desert, and needing water was a necessity of life and a reasonable concern. Their journey necessarily was one of moving from oasis to oasis; food was no longer an issue, but water was always an issue to a nomadic tent dwellers. There is no indication that the Israelites even thought to approach God about their need for water; rather they griped.....they worried.....they doubted and they feared. And, they blamed.....they blamed Moses and Yehoveh. Now, this situation WAS a little different than before when they needed water; because where Moses led them this time there was not even a hint of water, which in itself was strange. Moses was an experienced desert dweller, having lived in Midian.....and I suggest only a few miles from where the people of Israel stood, thirsty, at this very moment. He would ONLY have taken them to a place where normally there was water. So, probably we are dealing with some kind of unusual drought condition on the Arabian Peninsula, and the water source Moses expected to be present (near Rephidim) was dried up. Naturally, this was indeed a potential disaster.

Yet, one would reasonably assume that Israel would have remembered back to only a couple of weeks earlier, when at the bitter springs at Mara God miraculously made the water drinkable for them. But, apparently, they not only forgot about God’s interest in satisfying their physical need for water, but they never grasped the significance and lesson contained within His solution. Let’s revisit Mara for just a moment.

Back in chapter 15, we see Israel grumbling and in need of water. Moses brings them to a spring, an oasis that, in its natural state had water that was quite bitter to the taste. But, when some special, unnamed wood (obviously something that was available locally) is immersed into that bitter water at God's command, the water is cleansed of its bad taste, and it became useful to save their lives.

This is such a beautiful picture of what Christ would do for us 1400 years into the future. Here we are, mankind, our corrupt natural state being full of bitterness. Bitterness, in our Western way of thinking, generally is an emotion or an attitude or a mental state; it means that we are hanging on to hurts and offenses; we have developed a sense that life has been unfair to us, and as a result, we view the world around us cynically and reject joy. But, that typically is NOT what the Bible means by bitterness. Rather, scripturally, bitterness means the opposite of sweet, both in a real and in a poetic sense. Bitter means unbearable pain usually at the hands of another, suffering with no hope of escape, oppression....the root word for bitter, mara, is even associated with poison. The Jews of Nazi Germany were bitter; they were in a hopeless state of oppression beyond their own control.

Bitter, as a negative state of existence, is often used to describe the Israelites condition in Egypt. And, bitter is also the natural condition of all mankind; unable to save ourselves, unable to change ourselves, unable to shuck off our bitter existence, even if we don't recognize it as bitter.

And, now comes Christ, who is hung onto a piece of wood, His precious blood spilled all over it. But, what miraculous qualities that wood, that cross, has; for when that Divine wood, the Cross, is immersed into our lives and our bitterness, our oppression, is taken away. Often when something is immersed into a liquid that object takes on a different character. In point of fact the Greek word **baptizmo**, from which we get our English word baptize, means to immerse. And, the word **baptizmo** is a word that was borrowed from the cloth dying trade of the biblical era; that is, a natural cloth was **baptizmo** into a vat of dye, where the cloth took on the characteristics of that which it was immersed into. And so it is with those who are crucified with Yeshua; His wooden cross, immersed into our bitter lives, transforms our lives and makes them sweet and free from the oppression of the power of sin. This is the picture intended at the spring of Mara, out in the wilderness.

Well, lets return to Chapter 17 and Israel's newest need for water. Moses reminded them that while they may think their grumbling is against him, it's really against God. And Moses asks why they would test Yehoveh. Remember our Hebrew lesson about this word, test (or prove, or tempt in some versions); and that the Hebrew word used here is the same as we saw earlier: *nacah* (naw-saw). And, it carries with it the sense of being hauled into court and being put before a judge; that is, a trial proceeding. So, what Moses accused the people of doing was of literally putting God on trial; they were putting themselves in the position of judging God!

Yet, once again, God is merciful. Rather than rebuking Moses or the people for their lack of faith He simply provides for them. God tells Moses to take the people's representatives, the elders, and go to "the rock" at, or near, Mt. Horeb. And, there, using the same staff that Moses held up to part the Red Sea, Moses was to strike "the rock", and water would pour from it,

enough for everyone. It is interesting that this is the 2nd time we have found Moses being ordered to strike something with his staff, and both times it had to do with water. The first time was when he struck the Nile River and turned it bloody red, making it undrinkable. Now, he will strike a rock and the rock will produce **drinkable** water. Also notice how the staff of Moses.....which is really but God's staff of authority placed into Moses' hands.....was used in one case (at the Nile) for **wrath** upon people who were not His (the Egyptians); but in our current case it would be used to provide for **mercy** and protection of His own.

It's important that we see this difficult attribute of God: that from the same source (the Lord) comes blindness and revelation; destruction and salvation; darkness and light; shalom and despair. Goodness to those who submit to His Lordship, calamity to those who refuse it. We commit a terrible idolatry when we discard those characteristics of Yehoveh that bother us, and retain only those that please us. For, indeed, to do so makes us guilty of forming our own god-image from our own minds.....and this is the very definition of idolatry.

Now, I would be remiss if I didn't point out what could not possibly have been understood by Moses and the elders: that this event of striking the rock is yet another shadow of a future event. Christ, called the Rock, was smitten that living water would pour forth from Him for all of God's people. And let's also remember that when Yeshua, who was Himself living water, was stabbed with that Roman spear, that all who were watching saw physical, real water pour forth from that wound. This event at Horeb, and the Crucifixion at Calvary, were completely connected.....on both physical and spiritual levels.

Allow me to point out another interesting connection that is not readily seen in the English, but is in the original Hebrew: Moses was to use his staff (his rod) in God's name, to strike the rock at Horeb, just as he had struck the Nile about a year earlier. Remember, back in earlier chapters of Exodus when we discovered that the word used to describe the 9 blows that God visited upon Egypt that we usually call "plagues", was in Hebrew "nachah" (naw kah). Don't mix up two very similar sounding Hebrew words "nawah" (naw-saw) and "nachah".....nawah (nawsah) means to hold a trial, while nachah (nawkah) means to strike, or hit, deliver a blow. This word nachah (meaning to hit) would **not** be used to describe something benign like hitting a nail with a hammer; rather, it carries with it the sense of attacking with a purpose to cause harm, even to kill. Looking back, we can understand why "nachah" (nawkah) would have been used to appropriately describe these harmful, and eventually deadly, strokes upon Egypt that began with Moses striking the Nile River. So, the use of the word nachah when describing hitting the rock so that water would come forth seems out of place. What would be the point of using a word like nachah that has with it an aura of malice and violence, in this setting? And, Rabbis have mused for centuries on just why that word, **nachah**, which portrays striking with a sense of harm, would be used with Moses bringing forth water for his people to drink. If it were not for the connection with what would eventually happen to Our Rock, Yeshua, when He was struck with malice and violence, the use of that Hebrew word here at Horeb would be out of place.

We're told in vs. 7 that the place where the Israelites grumbled about needing water was named Massah and Merivah: usually translated "testing" and "quarrelling". A better translation of Massa than testing would be "tempting"; BTW, notice that this is NOT the same

word as used earlier when Moses accused the people of putting God on trial; that word was *nacah* (naw-saw)(with an “n”), while the name of the place was *massah* (with an “m”). And, why is the word “tempting” so appropriate here? Because these people, who have followed the cloud for 2 months, now slap God in the face by asking, at the end of vs. 7, “Is Yehoveh with us or not?”

Suddenly in verse 8 the scene changes and the people become engaged in their first battle with a hostile neighbor. This, of course, was the very thing that God had arranged for Israel to avoid in the first days of their Exodus, by insisting they take the desert wilderness route, rather than taking the direct route to Canaan using the major highway between Egypt and Canaan called the Way of the Philistines. For whatever reason, this battle with Amalek was a battle that God WANTED Israel to fight.

It is a group of people called Amalek that attacked Israel. We will find out later, in Deuteronomy 25, that Amalek attacked the rear of the long column of Israel, which consisted primarily of the stragglers: the weak, feeble, and sickly. This made what Amalek did all the more horrendous because Israel in no way threatened Amalek. But it is not at all surprising that it would be Amalek as the first to attack Israel; for the Amalekites were the descendants of Esau. So, while Amalek was related to Israel, because of the split between the twin brothers Jacob and Esau, they were also enemies (remember how Jacob connived to get the firstborn blessing, and all the wealth and power that went with it, away from his twin brother Esau.....and that later, Jacob became called Israel and produced the 12 tribes of Israel).

In vs. 9, Moses instructs Joshua (who would eventually become the leader of Israel after Moses’ death) to select the men who would fight Amalek, and then lead them in battle. As for Moses, he would stand on a hill above the battlefield, probably with his staff in hand. Along with him (up on the hill) would go his brother Aaron and a man named Hur. We can understand why Aaron, Moses’ prophet, would accompany him; but who is this Hur fellow? Well, we find him mentioned again in Ex. 24:14, and he seems to be Aaron’s assistant, though in the genealogies, he does not appear to be a blood relative of Aaron’s. Talmudic tradition is that Hur was Miriam’s husband (Miriam being Moses and Aaron’s sister).

Well, the battle begins: Joshua down in the valley leading his men, Moses, Aaron and Hur up on the hilltop observing, with Moses raising his hand. It is usually presumed that he was holding up his staff in his hand, but that is NOT what the Scriptures say. The presumption that he held his staff in his hand comes from the name of the victory altar that was built to commemorate this battle; because the altar’s name (*Yehoveh nissi*) implies that a banner or an insignia or some kind of device that symbolized Israel was used by Moses. And, vs. 11 says that a strange thing occurred: as long as Moses held his staff in the air, towards the heavens, the battle tilted in Israel’s favor. But, as soon as he put his arm holding the staff down for a rest, the battle swung towards Amalek. So, Aaron and Hur had Moses sit on a stone and then, one man on each side, they propped up Moses’ arms so that the staff would not have to be lowered as Moses arms grew tired, not even for a momentary rest. This battle went on, as battles in that day did, until sunset. And, so, Joshua’s men defeated Amalek.

Now, a couple of things of interest: first, let’s talk a little about Joshua. Joshua was of the tribe

of Ephraim. Hopefully, you recall the last 3 chapters of Genesis when the importance of the tribe of Ephraim was discussed. In fact, to understand the end times and Revelation, I urge you to study Ephraim who is a key that unlocks the door to many Biblical mysteries.

Technically at the time of this battle with Amalek Joshua was NOT yet called “Joshua”. His name was Hoshea, or in English, Hosea (this is NOT the same Hosea as the prophet Hosea that has his own book of the Bible). Hoshea means “help” or “salvation”. Sometime following this battle Hoshea’s name was changed. We’ve seen this name changing happen before, haven’t we? Abraham started out as just Abram, meaning father of many. Later, God said you would now be called Abra-ham, meaning EXALTED father. We saw Jacob, Ya’akov’s, name changed to Israel. And, now, Hoshea will have his name changed to Joshua. These two names (Joshua and Hoshea) are related, but we really can’t see it unless they are presented in their original Hebrew. Joshua is in Hebrew, Yehoshua; which means “Yah saves” or “God saves” or better “Yehoveh saves”. Most accurately, in Hebrew, Hoshea is Hoshua or Oshea. So, after the battle with Amalek, Hoshua (Hosea) has the word “Yah” added as a prefix to his name, so that it becomes Yah-Hoshua (Joshua). So, it’s easy to see, after this strange battle where Moses has to hold his staff up high to God in order for Israel to beat Amalek, that the leader and victor of this momentous battle would get his name changed to a name that reflected what happened that day, when God saved them from Amalek.

Now, one more thing and we’ll move on. Yehoshua is simply long hand for a name we’ve already become familiar with: Yeshua, Jesus. Jesus Christ. Yes, in our modern vocabulary, Joshua is the name Christ was born with. In Hebrew, Yeshua. Our Lord had the same name, as did this man that won the battle over Amalek. Here, again, we have an OT connection to the NT. Joshua, friend of Moses, PHYSICALLY saved Israel through God’s power. Joshua, Yeshua, Jesus Christ, SPIRITUALLY saved Israel, and all who would be joined to Israel, through God’s power. In both cases this was an act of God doing the saving. And let me assure you these connections are real, not contrived. They are there for us to SEE as connections, not coincidences. Unfortunately, often the connection is invisible if not presented in the original Hebrew language.

At the end of chapter 17, we get this bone-chilling instruction from God: He is going to completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. He is going fight Amalek generation after generation. Why? Why this ultimate condemnation from God upon Amalek?

Well, Amalek was not only real and tangible, being exactly as reported and doing exactly as reported, but they are also a type. Amalek was gentiles, and so represents those gentiles who come against Israel. Amalek were the first people to attack Israel after their redemption from Egypt. Amalek represents that force which opposes God’s people and God’s plan that is to be worked out through His people. This is not the last time we will hear of Amalek in the bible. Saul, first King of Israel, will be commanded by God to destroy Amalek as a punishment for their attempt to stop the advance of Israel during Moses’ days as their leader.....Saul never accomplished that. Several centuries later, the evil Haman, of Esther fame, is said to have been a descendant of Amalek. Many Arabs, today, are from the family of Amalek, which is the tribe of Esau. The Jordanians, for instance, are a people whose ancestors are a mix of Ishmael and Esau.

Moses then built an altar. This was a typical action of people in that day in reaction to an important event. This altar was a monument and a marker to commemorate the battle of Israel, and God, against Amalek. The altar was named Yehoveh Nissi: Yehoveh is my banner.

As we end this chapter, permit me to mention something briefly about Moses' staff and it being referred to here as a "banner" to God. There is a critical God Principle being set up, and it is this: when we turn our staff over to God, when we loosen our grip and give it to God, it becomes God's staff in HIS hand. Understand, that in ancient times, a staff, also sometimes referred to as a rod, and in later times as a scepter, is a symbol or representation of authority. Moses' staff, in human terms, was a symbol of Moses' authority. But, in raising his staff to heaven, the bible calling this act "raising a banner", this is symbolic of turning his authority over to God, whereby God does something miraculous: the staff of Moses becomes the staff of God.

This is the secret to the Christian life. As long as we cling tightly to our own personal authority and Lordship over our lives, then we are simply not usable by God. And, there is absolutely no power in our own authority. The strongest, most powerful, most brilliant, most wealthy of us ultimately have only our own personal natural human abilities to count on. But, turn that authority over to God, and He will fill it with His power. Moses' staff, under Moses' authority was just a dead piece of wood, even though it seemed to him like an indispensable tool for his trade as a shepherd, and necessary symbol of his authority over Israel. But that same staff, under God's authority, could part the Red Sea, turn the Nile to blood, and defeat the enemy in battle.

This principle is often expressed in modern Evangelical Christianity as yielding or surrendering to God. We see that principle being developed here in Exodus, with Moses.

READ EXODUS CHAPTER 18 all

It was long ago recognized by the ancient Hebrew Sages that this chapter is out of chronological sequence. The mention of God's Laws, of an Altar, and of Moses teaching God's rules to the people and then judging the people according to those rules could only have occurred after the Law was given on Mt. Sinai.

As chapter 18 opens, Moses' father-in-law makes a reappearance. Yitro, Jethro, the priest of Midian, had heard about all that had happened concerning Israel, and came to greet Moses. As we have discussed, news traveled fast in those days; people in other nations knew what was going on in other regions. And, you can bet that there were MANY regions and nations that were holding their collective breath, wondering just where this 3 million strong mob were going to land.

This is another of the many chapters of Exodus, that for reasons unknown to me (albeit I have my suspicions), the bible translators consistently chose to use the word "God" or "Lord" whenever the word "Yehoveh" appeared. So, when we look at the original language texts what we see is that Yitro KNEW the God of the Hebrews' name, and we can safely assume that the same people and nations who knew of the happenings in Egypt concerning Israel

ALSO knew the name of Israel's God...Yehoveh. In that era knowing a god's name was considered vitally important because the superstition was that if you knew the NAME of the god who lorded over some area of responsibility like the weather, or fertility, or prosperity, or battle, then by invoking that god's name, that god HAD to do what you requested.

One of Yitro's purposes for coming to meet Moses was to bring Moses' wife, Tziphora, plus their two sons to Moses. It says, in vs. 2, that she had been sent home. That pretty well fits with the tradition concerning Tziphora that she was a real firebrand. That she created such a problem for Moses that when Moses was on his way from Midian to Egypt to confront Pharaoh, she became so belligerent that he sent her home. Anyone remember what the name Tziphora means? Well, first let's remember that it is a very Bedouin name.....and it means "bird".....of which she was anything but. And, BTW, that name is still in use today. It is generally thought that the rather interesting episode where Tziphora publicly confronts Moses about his not having yet circumcised his sons, and God being angry with Moses to the point of threatening his life for this omission, is what led Moses to sending Tziphora and her sons home to Yitro, her father.

Now, vs. 5 says that Moses was at "the mountain of God" when Yitro showed up. This is kind of interesting, because it is another evidence that this story is a little out of order in Exodus, because we don't even hear of the Exodus refugees moving and encamping at the foot of Mt. Sinai until the next chapter. I had warned you last week that the Torah is NOT always in perfect chronological order, and this is one of those instances. But, this is also well in line with the God instructed incident of the striking of the rock in order that water might be obtained; because it is said that this rock was in the mountain range of Horeb, which is the mountain range where Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God, is located. I think it also reveals that Yitro knew exactly where this mountain of God was. He knew this because, a) he was very near to his own homeland of Midian, and b) because there apparently had been some sort of correspondence between Moses and Yitro, as it says in vs. 6, and c) because likely Moses had taken him there some years earlier, or at the least, made clear to Yitro its location.

I don't want to run it into the ground, but it is very likely that the Mountain of God was no more than a very few days journey from Yitro's home, and so places Mt. Sinai right where the Apostle Paul says it is: in Arabia....or better.....on the Arabian Peninsula. Let's remember that the mountain of God where Moses was leading the Israelite people was the same place where Moses had encountered God in the burning bush. And, at the time of the burning bush incident, Moses was living with his father-in-law, in the land of Midian.

It says Moses ran out to meet his father-in-law and fell prostrate before him. This was a traditional sign of respect given to the head of the family, which was Yitro.

It sure would be fun to have been able to overhear their conversation. Of Moses talking to his young boys and his listening to their stories about what had been happening in their lives during his absence. And, I'd sure like to know WHICH Tziphora showed up: the one that mellowed a little, remorseful perhaps and missing her husband, or the one that gave him heck for going in the first place and then being gone too long! And, of course, to hear Moses recounting miracle after breathtaking miracle that Yehoveh had performed to save Israel and

reduce Egypt to devastation. Then, undoubtedly, relating to Yitro the unending problems of dealing with this enormous population of never-satisfied, ungrateful people, who didn't miss an opportunity to tell Moses just what he was doing wrong!

Now, in vs. 9-12, many scholars think we have a recounting of a gentile conversion to the religion of the Hebrews. Yes, Yitro was gentile, NOT an Israelite. And, although he is called a priest he was not a priest of Yehoveh but of some other religion, and some other system of gods. We don't just have to assume that: because the ONLY priestly tribe of Israel was the Levites, with the Levite Aharon as the High Priest. And, there is no indication anywhere that Yitro could possibly have been a member of Israel, let alone a Levite, so in order to offer a sacrifice on Israel's altar he would have had to confess loyalty to Israel and the God of Israel.

We get an important glimpse into the mind of the people of that era, as Yitro has the stories he has heard concerning the power of the Hebrew god confirmed by Moses; and in vs. 11 Yitro makes the confession that Yehoveh is greater than all gods. And, he follows that up, by making a sacrifice to Yehoveh, in the presence of Moses and Aharon and all the elders of Israel, and then finishing it up with a meal. This was the standard way of making a covenant, a B'rit. Back in Genesis we discussed at length how covenants were cut. And, we see here that what Yitro did was to make a covenant before God, probably declaring his allegiance to Yehoveh, and therefore to Israel. Now, did he, therefore, renounce his other gods? Did he now adhere to a monotheistic ideal.....that is, that there is only one god and his name is Yehoveh? Probably not. He simply acknowledged that Yehoveh was the god of the Hebrews, and the El.....the chief god.....which would have set just fine with Israel, for in general that's how they viewed Yehoveh as well (just the greatest god among the many gods).

Let me point out something else for you that will become more apparent after we have finished Exodus and study the book of Leviticus: verse 12 (almost universally) in English translations says that Yitro brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God. What it says in the original language is that Yitro brought an 'Olah and a Zevah for Yehoveh. The 'Olah was a very specific kind of sacrifice, as was the Zevah. And, of course, we see that Yitro didn't bring those two exclusively Hebrew sacrifices, each with their own special meaning (which, by the way, were only ordained in the Law given at Mt. Sinai) to some god in general; these sacrifices were of course (just as it says in Hebrew) for the God named Yehoveh.

Let's stop here and pick up the remainder of Chapter 18 next week.