

Exodus – Lesson 13

The Journey to Sinai – Part 2

Read Exodus 17:1-18:27

1. (a) Compare Exodus 17:1 to Numbers 33:14-15. *Where* are the people at this point in the story? Why is this significant?

The people have made it most of the way south in the Sinai peninsula, to the wilderness of Sin, and are now at Rephidim. The significance is that this is *another* place for the Lord to test the people by bringing them to a desolate location with no water; a place that they would have to trust in God for their very survival. Both texts note that the people traveled in “*stages*,” implying that this was precisely how God intended them to travel: from one place to another, with each place *forcing* the people to rely on God and believe in him for the next step of the journey.

- (b) How did the people *respond* to their situation? Who did the people *blame* for this? Why?

The people responded (again!) by complaining about their situation. Instead of believing that God could (again!) provide for their needs in a supernatural way, they chose to murmur and complain and *fail* to remember the power of God. After all, they are *still* getting up each morning and collecting manna. So, they should be able to trust the Lord as they did in the past. Alas, they do not! Instead, they choose to blame *Moses* for this situation (note v. 3). They blame Moses for “*bringing them up out of Egypt*,” as though Moses’ *words* had been sufficient to make Pharaoh change his mind and release the Hebrews. They blame Moses because they are *blind* to the power of God, and have not yet been fully convinced of the care of God over them. Four hundred years of living without a direct word from God has blinded them to his power, and he has not yet made his presence known among them.

- (c) What does God tell Moses to *do*? What does it mean that God stood “*before [them] on the rock*?”

God tells Moses to strike the rock at Horeb with the staff that he used to strike the Nile. This act of “*symbolism*” will remind the Israelites that the power of God can be used in both ways: to supernaturally make water unfit to drink and also to provide its life-sustaining power when necessary. God “*stood before*” them, meaning that he himself was present at the rock, and that the life-giving water flowed from him (metaphorically speaking). Rocks do not normally “*spout*” water when they are struck; God provided for the flow of water from the rock to show that this was *his work* and *his power*, a lesson the Hebrews have consistently forgotten.

- (d) How is this situation similar to the one in Numbers 20:2-13? How is it different? Why the difference?

There are a number of similarities: 1) it appears from the text (note 20:1) that this is a similar *location* to the events of Exodus 17 (Sin = Zin), 2) in both cases, the people are in need of water, 3) in both cases, the people complain about having left Egypt and blame Moses for their troubles, and 4) in both cases, Moses strikes the rock for water. However, there is *one* significant difference: God told Moses, in this situation, to *speak* to the rock (not strike it; note 20:8), and Moses is punished by God for his failure to follow God’s instructions *literally*. Moses is told to *speak* to the rock, in this case, to demonstrate the power of *word* over a “*brute force*” move. The people have *heard* the law of God, having been at Sinai, and they need to learn the power of the word of God. By failing to exercise this example before the people, Moses is punished by being withheld from entering into the promised land.

2. (a) According to Exodus 17:8, what is the next major *obstacle* the people face? Why does God *allow* this problem to surface at this point?

At this point, the people of Amalek come and fight against the Hebrews. The Amalekites, descended from Amalek, a grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:12, 1 Chron. 1:36), are a nomadic people who live in the south of Palestine (see 2b) and attack the Hebrews in the Sinai peninsula. It is possible that they attack the Israelites because they see this large group of Hebrews (and others) as a threat to their territory and because of the rumors that have come out of Egypt regarding their way of escape (i.e. the power of God demonstrated there). It is possible that God has allowed this problem to surface for a number of reasons: 1) it is part of the *normal* course of events that are likely to take place, so there is no *special* significance to it other than nations protecting themselves, 2) it is designed to *strengthen* the Hebrews by giving them an *initial* people to fight against so that they can learn how to fight, or 3) it is designed to show (like so much before) the *power* of God over any potential enemy, and is used by God to demonstrate to this rag-tag group of people they would not have to fight, but that God would fight for them (see 2c). Moses understood this reality when he uttered the words he did in Exodus 15:14-15.

- (b) Read Numbers 13:29. Where do the *Amalekites* dwell? Where do the other *nations* listed in this verse make their home? Why is this *significant* to the Hebrews in the future?

Although the Amalekites are typically understood to be a nomadic people-group, they occupy wilderness territory to the south of Palestine, from the Dead Sea west to the Mediterranean (a territory known as the *Negeb*). Eventually, the Amalekites would be situated south of the territory of Judah. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwelt in the central hill country, which runs north/south west of the Jordan valley. This would become the *primary* territory of the Hebrews after the conquest; they would be limited to this land because of their failure to conquer the Canaanites, who occupied territory in the plains to the west of the hill country (note Judges 1:19, 34). All of these nations would be *central* in the Conquest.

- (c) Why do *you* think that the Hebrews prevailed in this battle whenever Moses' hands were up?

The people of Israel were able to prevail against the Amalekites when Moses held up his hands because 1) the Israelites saw Moses' hands as a rally cry, and were able to muster up the energy and fighting skills necessary to win whenever they saw the motivation of Moses' hands uplifted, or (more likely) 2) the power of God *flowed* through the Israelites whenever Moses lifted up his hands in accordance with God's implied instructions. The uplifting of Moses' hands was not some "mystical" motivation or even supernatural conduit, but an act of *obedience* that God required as a part of his work to overcome the Amalekites through the Hebrews.

- (d) From Exodus 17:14, list some reasons why God instructs Moses to record this as a "*memorial*."

God gives three primary reasons why this needs to be written down: 1) it needed to be recorded as Israel's first military victory, a permanent record of what God had done for them, 2) Joshua needed to know that this was a *part* of the overarching plan of God into the future, as he took the reins of leading the people in the Conquest, and 3) it would be a *promise* of God that the Amalekites were marked out for destruction by God because they had chosen to act treacherously against his people.

- (e) Read 1 Samuel 15:1-8. Connect this story to the *prophecy* of God in Exodus 17:14-16.

God had promised, after the Amalekites had ambushed the Israelites coming out of Egypt, that he would wipe them out of existence. That did not come to fruition during the Conquest, as the Amalekites were able to survive with some allies (note Judges 6:3, 33; 7:12). However, once God had "used" the Amalekites for his final purposes, he instructs Saul (the first king) to wipe them out completely, a command that Saul *did not* fully obey. It would appear that the national identity of a people known as Amalekites did not disappear until after David (note 2 Samuel 8:11-12).

3. (a) From Exodus 18:1-9, list some reasons why *Jethro* comes out to see Moses in the wilderness.

Jethro had heard of what had happened in Egypt, and he comes out to see Moses and to speak to Moses about these things. Undoubtedly, Jethro is fascinated by what has taken place and, being one who fears God, wants to know more. Additionally, Jethro comes out to deliver Moses' wife and children to him (who he has been taking care of) in order that the family might be back together again now that the danger of Egypt is behind them.

- (b) According to Exodus 18:13-16, what has Moses been *doing* for the people along the way?

Moses has been acting as a *judge*, deciding the various disputes that have arisen amongst the people. He has become the "court system" for the people, listening to the various disagreements that have come up and decided how to adjudicate each grievance.

- (c) What *advice* does Jethro give to his son-in-law? *Why* would Jethro give Moses such advice?

Jethro instructs Moses to delegate *leadership* to trustworthy men throughout the people, dividing the people up into various groups, from thousands to hundreds to fifties to tens. Jethro instructs Moses to divide the people up into varying stratum and appoint God-fearing men over each strata in order to relieve him of the duty of hearing every complaint. Instead, issues could be handled at the lowest level first (the strata of ten) and, if that didn't work, the dispute could be brought to a higher level until, eventually, it reached Moses. Hopefully, this would reduce immensely the number of disputes that Moses himself would need to adjudicate, giving him time to seek the Lord, learn his statutes and ways, and teach the people accordingly (note vv. 19-20). This would be *especially* important when Moses was away from the people for any extended time, such as his time on Mount Sinai. Jethro gives this advice because 1) it is practical and logical, 2) it is an early object lesson on the need for trustworthy leadership to be developed, especially as the people settle in the promised land, and 3) it is an important leadership principle to be able to delegate responsibility without compromising authority.