

**Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church**  
10 Downing Street, Oakleigh, Vic. 3166

**DHW**  
**BIBLE STUDY CLASS**

**LESSON 15**

**THE BOOK OF EXODUS**

**CHAPTERS 17 & 18**

***INTRODUCTION***

As the children of Israel journeyed on towards the place where God wanted them to be, they faced many difficulties and dangers. Like the children of Israel, we are also faced with many problems and struggles in our spiritual journey through life until the day we enter Heaven. Therefore, these two chapters are valuable to us in a practical way. We can learn from their reactions to these difficulties and dangers. We also will learn how the LORD interacted with them in those circumstances. There were times when their attitudes and actions were not right but there were also times when individuals did well and help the group out of their

troubles. We learn from their failures as well as their successes.

In our earlier lessons in Exodus, we have seen pictures of Christ, like He was the spiritual *manna* from Heaven in which we must daily feed on in order to grow spiritually. Now in Exodus 17, we see another picture of Christ as the rock which Moses smote and out of it flowed streams of living water for the thirsty Israelites (1 Corinthians 10:4). We can also see how Jethro came to accept the God of the Israelites as the only true and living God through Moses' witness.

The following outline will facilitate the study of these two chapters:

- 1) The children of Israel again murmured against Moses at Rephidim (17:1-7);
- 2) The Amalekites attacked the children of Israel (17:8-16);
- 3) Moses was reunited with his wife and two sons (18:1-12);
- 4) Moses accepted Jethro's advice (18:13-23);

- 5) Moses carried out Jethro's counsel (18:24-27).

### ***STUDY THE WORD***

#### **Israelites Again Murmur Against Moses**

The Israelites journeyed on from the wilderness of Sin and arriving at Rephidim they pitched their tents. It was a *resting place* as the name suggests. Ironically, the river had dried up as there was no water. The people began to contend with Moses to demand water from him (17:2). The Israelites had forgotten so quickly what God had done at Marah, and for that matter, what God had done for them in Egypt. At Marah God made a covenant with them that if they trusted and obeyed Him, He would be their Healer. But alas, they had forgotten what God had said to them.

Moses' response – *why chide ye with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?* The word *tempt* in Hebrew is *nissah*, which means to test or prove. The same word is used when God tested Abraham's

faith (Genesis 22:1).<sup>1</sup> What Moses was saying to the people was why put God to the test. Their problem was not about him because he was powerless to provide them the water they demanded. Therefore, their murmuring was against God for He was the only One who was able to provide them with water. It did not calm the people. Instead they accused him for bringing them to the desert to kill them and their cattle with thirst. This is an outright challenge to the leadership of Moses, who was God's chosen leader.

It was not wrong for them to ask for water. But their complaint was not at all an innocent request for water. They demanded water from Moses. They insisted on it. They were wrong in their attitude. Insofar as Moses was concerned, they were demanding from God to give them water. They would not wait for God, who definitely knew about the lack of water. He would have provided for them. Moses'

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 22:1 *and it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. God does not "tempt" a person to sin. God tested Abraham's faith and love.*

only recourse was to turn to the LORD. How we praise the LORD that He did not strike the people dead for their faithlessness and distrust in the LORD.

The LORD instructed Moses to go before the people and to take with him their elders and also his rod (17:5). Moses obediently did so. The LORD would be with him on the rock in Horeb. Moses was to strike the rock and water would flow out of it to provide water for the Israelites. This is a miraculous act of God, for with Him nothing is impossible. It should not be a problem with Christians. This miraculous act answered all the questions of the Israelites. It re-established Moses' leadership which had been challenged. They should listen and obey him. A second thing is that the LORD (His covenant name) was true to His covenant-promise to provide and protect them. And finally, it also answered their question whether the LORD was with them. Indeed, He was, for Moses prayed to the LORD and He gave them water. He was with them.

### **The Amalekites Attack the Children of Israel**

The absence of water at Rephidim was not the only problem. Another problem arose. All of a sudden and unexpectedly the Amalekites attacked the children of Israel. This was the very first military battle which the Israelites encountered in their journey to the Promised Land. The Amalekites were nomadic people and it was not revealed why they attacked the Israelites. According to Genesis 36:12, they were the descendants of Amalek the grandson of Esau.<sup>2</sup> They might have felt threatened by the huge number of the Israelites (no less than 2 million).

When the Israelites were attacked they had to defend themselves. Moses called Joshua to command a group of chosen men to defend the people against the enemy (17:9) – *Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine*

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 36:12 *And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek: these were the sons of Adah Esau's wife.*

*hand*. This is the first mention of Joshua. He was then a young man. The fact that Moses assigned him the task of choosing able men and to lead them to fight against the Amalekites indicates that Joshua must be a man of proven intelligence and capabilities. So we see that he is being introduced as a strong and able man with military ability. It also strongly suggests that he was Moses' *aide-de-camp*.

Joshua obediently did what Moses told him to do. Now what is most instructive in this battle is that Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the mountain top to pray. Moses held up the rod in his hand in a posture of praying to the LORD. And as long as his hand was raised Joshua prevailed in the battle. But when he lowered his hand because of weariness, the Amalekites would prevail. Interestingly Aaron and Hur brought a stone and placed it under Moses for him to sit; and each of them supported the left and right hands of Moses. In this way the Israelites won the battle, although the Amalekites were not totally defeated (17:14). The battle was won in two ways. There was

the physical confrontation with the enemy, and there was the prayerful support of the leaders. God did not directly destroy the Amalekites but He required the Israelites to take responsibility to take up arms to defend themselves. However, the Israelites' victory was because of the intervention of the LORD. Another interesting note is the mentioning of Moses being told by the LORD to write the event as a memorial in a book for posterity to read and know what the LORD had done for His people (17:14).

#### **Moses Reunites with His Wife and Two Sons**

Separation between loved ones is sad and sometimes painful. And reunion of family members is always a happy and wonderful occasion. Moses was reunited with his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought his wife and the children to meet Moses at Mount Sinai. It is mentioned that Moses had earlier sent his wife and children back to Jethro. There was no mention of this incident previously. The last mention of Moses' wife and

children is in Exodus 4:25.<sup>3</sup> Moses must have sent them back after that incident.

Jethro's initiative to bring Zipporah and the children to meet their father Moses at Mount Sinai speaks a lot about him. Presuming that Jethro was much older than Moses, he was a good and kind father-in-law to take the trouble to bring Zipporah and the children to be reunited with their father. One would expect Moses to make the effort to visit Jethro's house to see his wife and children.

Moses' meeting with his father-in-law is exemplary. When he heard that his father-in-law was on his way to meet him, Moses went out to meet him, and accorded to him the filial honour and respect expected of him. Moses truly was a humble and proper person. While there is no mention of Moses meeting with Zipporah and the children, it must not be taken that Moses did not care for them. It was

the culture of Orientals not to talk too much about their family.

Moses had a good meeting with Jethro. Moses shared what God had done in Egypt and for Israel. It is possible that Jethro was not a believer of Yahweh. So Moses shared the greatness and goodness of Yahweh with Jethro. On hearing this Jethro rejoiced and praised God. Jethro also made a burnt offering and sacrifice to God. This could be an indication of Jethro's conversion that he believed in the God of Israel (Exodus 18:11) - *Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them.* Jethro, being a priest of Midian had been an idolator worshipping many gods. But now having heard Moses' testimony of the wonderful and stupendous works of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he renounced all his gods and acknowledged and accepted that the LORD God of the Israelites was the greatest, the one true and living God. Observe that he used the covenant-name of God *the LORD* (18:11). In addition, he offered burnt offerings and

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 4:25 *Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.*

sacrifices unto God. They then had a meal together. This is significant. Among ancient Near East it was the custom to ratify a pact or covenant with a fellowship meal.

### **Moses Accepts Jethro's Advice**

The work of God is not a one-man-show. Jethro's meeting with Moses was providential. Jethro observed that Moses alone had been doing everything. The people lined up from morning till evening to see Moses to hear and settle their disputes and then to give them the counsels of the LORD. Jethro commented that what Moses was doing was not good. The way Moses was doing would certainly wear him or burn him out, and also the people. The work was too great and too much for him to perform alone (18:18).

Jethro had a better suggestion. Moses should remain as the people's advocate by giving the counsel of God to the people. He should meet the people only on more important matters. All other matters could be delegated to the leaders who had different levels of administrative skills and abilities. These administrators must also be

men who feared God; men who were honest; and men who were not covetous. These four qualities - God-fearing, honest, not covetous and capable - were essential for all the leaders. The wonderful thing about Moses here is that he humbly accepted Jethro's advice and implemented it. Jethro also told him that if God so commanded him, he should adopt the method as he had suggested (18:23).

The work of God is teamwork. It is humanly impossible for any one person to be effective and at the same time efficient in performing all the work of the church. The Apostle Paul describes the church as the Body of Christ, of which Christ is the Head; and all the other parts of the body are members of the church. Although they may be diverse in their abilities they function as one unified body. Each member discharges his own responsibility and duty for the benefit and welfare of the whole body. There is always danger for one man to try to do everything or too much. He is stretched too thin and becomes ineffective and feelings of weariness and frustration set in.

Another thing we learn is that organized administration in a church is not unbiblical. It is unscriptural for a church to adopt an administration in which everyone does what is right in his own eyes. Pious words that are unscriptural will mean nothing and nonsensical. The work of the church of Christ must be done decently and in order. Let each member of the Body of Christ discover his own natural and spiritual gifts and use them for the growth and development of the church.

#### **Moses Carries out Jethro's Counsel**

Moses listened to Jethro's advice and carried out all that his father-in-law had told him to do. Moses chose able men out of all Israel. He did not choose only from his friends or from a few preferred families or tribes. He made them leaders to oversee the people making decisions over matters brought up by the people. The difficult cases they brought them before Moses. Having seen Moses implemented his proposals, Jethro left and went on his way to his own land.

#### ***PRACTICAL VALUE***

There are many precious spiritual lessons which we can learn from these two chapters. The children of Israel's demand for water in Rephidim showed their lack of faith and trust in God to provide them with provisions and protection for God would make sure that they would not die in the wilderness. They also showed their denial of the presence of God as they had asked (17:7): *Is the LORD among us, or not?* We must learn to be persevering in our faith and trust in the LORD our God. In the church we have elected our God-fearing, trustworthy and capable leaders. We must respect and cooperate with them in carrying out the work of the Lord as they have instructed us. When they are in difficulties we should not be quick to criticize or blame them. There are always room to ask and find out more about the matter in question. If we resort to oppose our leaders without giving them the due respect and opportunity to explain, we must realize that indirectly we are going against God. If the leaders have a good and honest faith in God, He will vindicate His servant-

leaders, and we will be in danger of incurring the displeasure of God. This is an important lesson to learn to grow and mature in our spiritual life.

Very often unbelievers and even some Christians whenever they could not get what they want, they would demand from God just like the children of Israel demanding water and not patiently trusting the LORD to provide for them. They put God to the test, saying, that if He is God why does He not give this or that? This is the wrong attitude to have. We must trust God for He knows our needs and He will provide for us. Just do not be unbelieving for unbelief is a terrible sin.

Our Christian life is filled with ups and downs. In order to have victory in life's struggle against the enemies—sin, Satan, and the world—we can only overcome by prayer and action. Indeed, we must face the enemy up front but we can only be victorious if we unceasingly and earnestly pray to the LORD. The LORD will be with us. We saw this in the experience of the Israelites when the Amalekites suddenly attacked

them. Moses built an altar and named it *Jehovah-nissi* (Jehovah is my Banner). Unless the LORD our God is held high and be depended upon in prayer, we will never have the victory in our battle against the spiritual powers of darkness that seek to disrupt, defeat and destroy us. Learn this lesson well. When was the last time you wrestled in prayer and fought against the enemy?

Finally, Moses taught us to be humble and teachable. As God's servant whom the LORD spoke to directly, he was not proud about that fact. He humbled himself in paying his respect and honour to Jethro, his father-in-law. He showed that he was teachable when Jethro explained to him the weakness of his method attending daily affairs of the people. This writer thinks that Moses after considering and weighing Jethro's proposal accepted and implemented it readily. We all need to learn this lesson, to be humble and teachable, especially pastors, elders, and deacons of the church.

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