

## Exodus Chapters 17-18 - John Karmelich

When I studied these two chapters, I kept thinking about the question, "How does God want us to deal with life's trials?" These two chapters are final ones prior to where the "10 Commandments" are given. Obviously trials are a part of life. As most of us know, God wants to guide our lives. When we begin a relationship with God I usually find He's "holding our hands" as we learn to trust Him. As we grow in that trust, God lets us make our own decisions as if He's asking us, "Do you trust Me now even through this?" One of the greatest things I ever learned when it comes to trusting God is to understand what the Promised Land represents: It's not about living a pain free life. The Israelites fought wars in the land of Israel. What that land represents is our willingness to trust God to guide our life. Realize the Israelites here in Exodus didn't get to enter that land until they got their old ways of thinking out of their system. That was a 40 year process! I'm getting into all of this as these chapters come right before the Israelites learning about God's laws. They still had to face trials and take steps to trust God!

As always, I assume I'm writing to Christians who already believe Jesus is God and believe He paid in full for our sins and He's in charge of our lives. That's step 1. My "now what" issue here is how do we trust Him through the trials of our lives? Obviously God doesn't rain food down out of the sky as we've read in the previous chapter. As we read of several more trials the Israelites face before reaching what we call Mount Sinai (the mountain where God gave the 10 commandments) the focus is on how they're dealing with their trials (and what we can learn from that experience). By the way many scholars argue Chapter 18 occurred after the law was given. That begs the question, why was it placed at this spot? I'd argue it fits well in the issues of how to handle trials as we learn to fully trust God with every aspect of our life which again, is what the Promised Land represents. It is important to bring this up even before the "Big 10". It'll become more obvious as we go through these two chapters. Speaking of which:

We last read of the Israelites dealing with the fact God rained bread down from heaven for all the years they spent in the wilderness. In Chapter 17 the Israelites moved to a new spot where no water could be found. Remember they they're still in the desert in the middle of "nowhere". After a lot of complaining we read that Moses took the stick he used for the miracles, struck a rock and water rolled out. No, God doesn't work like that for us. He expects us as mature believers to figure out what's best thing to do for whatever situation we're dealing with. God does for us what we can't do for ourselves (e.g., provide air to breath, gravity, etc.). Anyway God was teaching the Israelites to trust Him in "baby steps". The next one's about learning to trust Him to provide for us as we grow in our faith towards Him. Moses solved the water problem by striking a rock and water gushed out. To state what may be obvious to Christians striking the rock (for water) is symbolic of Jesus being struck for us, to provide what we need as we go through life. By the way Paul said the rock that Moses struck here was a model of Jesus. He said that in 1st Corinthians 10:4! OK then, back to the story.

The next issue the Israelites faced was their first recorded war. Remember with the Egyptians nobody on the Israelite side had to "lift a finger" to fight, as God drowned that army by Himself. Now they are out in the middle of nowhere and we read of another group trying to wipe them out. A cross-reference in the book of Deuteronomy states that this tribe attacked the weakest Israelites after they suffered from a lack of water. The remainder of Chapter 17 describes a big battle with a group called the Amalekites as the Israelites fought them. Moses led by holding up his stick. When he was doing that, the Israelites were winning. We read Moses had help holding the stick up. One man was Moses' brother Aaron, who became the first Israelite head priest. I'd argue that he represents our prayer life just as we want God to guide us as He's guiding the Israelites to victory. Another man who held up Moses other arm was Hur. I'd argue (based on the meaning of his name) that he represented "light" just as the light of the scripture

guides us on how to live. In other words, prayer alone isn't enough for God to guide us. We also need His word to guide our lives. Anyway, it's a nice picture of God guiding us through trials dealing with a force that's trying to prevent us from accomplishing His will.

All of that leads to Chapter 18. At this point Moses catches up with His father in law. Moses was 80 at this point in his life. He got married about 40 years earlier and had two sons. We don't read of a father/son or a husband/wife reunion as the chapter focuses on Moses' relationship with His father-in law. We learn that his wife and sons went back to her father during the whole Exodus period as Moses was busy doing the miracles to ruin Egypt! Anyway, the chapter focuses on Moses explaining what happened to the Israelites since they last talked and how God destroyed Egypt. The most interesting thing is that his father in law (who was a priest to another deity) performed a sacrifice to God. Not positive he gave his life to God at this point, but it's a step in the right direction. It shows that we can still be a good witness for God even when we're going through trials. Moses' father in law (Jethro) claimed that God is greater than all the gods so I'll take that as a positive sign.

Then comes the main issue of the chapter: The delegation of authority. As I stated earlier, many argue that this incident came after the 10 Commandments because it states that Moses helped the Israelites to settle disputes that had to do with interpreting God's laws and obviously that hasn't occurred yet. We've got this section here as part of the series of learning to trust God as one is growing in one's faith. What we learn is we can get wisdom from places other than God Himself as long as it Godly wisdom. Since it's in the bible we can definitely classify it as Godly wisdom.

The short version is Moses was spending all day settling disputes. Let's be honest, whenever one deals with a large group, disputes arise. His father in law's advice in effect was, "delegate your authority so you can free your time up". In essence it's appoint local leaders to deal with disputes and like the court system, one can work their way up the ladder if one wants to appeal the case. It is considered a classic debate in Judaism whether or not this advice deprived people of getting the chance to talk to Moses. I'd argue since Moses took this advice and made life easier for himself it's a "moot point".

Ok good for Moses. Why should I care, other than understanding how our court system works! It tells us that in life, we need to deal with problems the best we can. Often, we need to go through some sort of legal system to deal with disputes. At the time of this writing, I'm dealing with my own legal issues. I make my best arguments to the judge and accept the results whatever is decided. This reminds us that in life problems occur and if we can't resolve it ourselves, legal means are set up to deal with it. Larger churches even set up their own "boards" to deal with such disputes in the church. My point is all this is biblical. So why is this given right before the 10 Commandments section? I believe it's to teach us how to best apply God's laws once we learn them. Obviously teachers and judges are necessary to guide us on studying how God wants us to live so having this "in place" before the laws are actually given is the prelude to the law itself. In effect, it's another way God is guiding us to grow closer to Him. With that said, thanks for reading and hope I've given you good "food for thought" for this week.

If interested, there are two other links on this chapter. They are for a more detailed lesson that I wrote about 20 years ago. Of course, you're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John