

Reformation Fellowship Notes • October 16, 2016

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Handout #17

Exodus 17:1 to 18:12

I. Introduction

- A. Last week the Israelites made their way down the east side of Gulf of Suez.
 - 1. They ran out of water at Marah.
 - a) God had Moses throw a tree into the water, and it became sweet.
 - 2. They complained about a dearth of food.
 - a) God provided quail and manna.
 - b) Manna was a pedagogical tool.
 - 3. Now they are turning inland.

- B. Toby's question

II. About Faith, Submission, and Obedience

- A. Question: Does God want obedience or submission?
 - 1. It is often hard to know what God wants us to do.
 - a) This makes obedience hard.
 - 2. Is it not better to think of what God requires as a spirit of submission?
- B. Response:
 - 1. I agree that it is sometimes very hard to know what God wants us to do.
 - a) It is also true that it is sometimes very clear what God wants us to do.
 - b) It should be our persistent desire to do what God wants us to do.
 - (1) When we know what that is, we should do it.
 - c) A persistent desire to do what God wants us to do could be called submission.
 - (1) Acts of obedience are important as verification of a spirit of submission.
 - 2. In Exodus, the emphasis is on obedience.
 - a) God's commands are clear and simple.
 - (1) Throw the tree in the water.
 - (2) Don't gather manna on the Sabbath.
 - (3) Don't keep manna for the next day.
 - b) No Israelite could have plausibly argued, "I didn't know what God wanted me to do."
 - 3. God started training his people much like we start training our children.

- a) When toddlers, we give them as few rules as possible and strictly enforce them.
 - b) As children get older, the rules increase, and their meaning becomes far more nuanced.
4. Faith is not a part of the presentation at this point.
- a) Moses does not talk about faith.
 - b) And yet the question as to whether God should be trusted was clearly on the minds of the Israelites.
 - (1) Too often they did not think he could be trusted.
 - c) Much of what God is doing at this time is to give the Israelites reason to believe he is trustworthy.

III. Exodus 17:1-7

- A. Israelites arrived in the Wilderness of Sin six weeks after leaving Egypt.
 - 1. This had been over relatively level terrain.
 - 2. At this point, they turned away from the coast and started climbing.
 - 3. Over the next six weeks, they will cover far fewer miles, but they will go from sea level to about 10,000 feet in elevation.
 - 4. It was June or July and very hot.
 - a) But as they rise in elevation, the temperatures become much more moderate.
- B. They went to Rephidim.
 - 1. It is not known where this is (Wadi Refayid? Wadi Feiran?); the name means "rest."
 - 2. There was no water to drink.
 - a) Most serious situation yet: no water at all.
- C. They quarreled with Moses.
 - 1. "Give us water!"
 - a) They are arrogant—presuming they know better than God what should happen and thinking God has not done right by them.
 - b) They direct their anger at Moses.
- D. Their quarrel is with God not Moses.
 - 1. They are testing God—is he on our side?
 - a) God has been putting the Israelites to the test.
 - (1) That is his prerogative.
 - b) Now they are putting God to the test.
 - (1) John Mackay argues that this section is in the form of a lawsuit.
 - (a) God is being put up for trial.

- (i) They want God to prove that he is really on their side.
 - (b) That is hubris.
 - (i) God has given an abundance of evidence.
 - (ii) To continue to question God's presence with them is *to refuse to trust*.
 - 2. They express more mistrusting than ever.
 - a) You want to kill us, our children, and our livestock.
 - 3. They are so distraught that they want to kill Moses.
- E. "What shall I do to this people?"
- 1. This is a strange statement to come from the mouth of Moses.
 - a) Why does he think that *he* is the one responsible to do something?
 - b) Why does he say, "do to *this* people"?
 - c) I am not sure what is going on here, but this is my best reconstruction.
 - 2. As I understand it, Moses was born to lead his people out of Egypt.
 - a) But when he tried to provide leadership, his people rejected him.
 - (1) Moses left Egypt alienated from them.
 - (2) He began to identify with the Midianites rather than the Israelites.
 - (3) When God appeared to him, he did not want to go back to his people.
 - (a) They had rejected him; he had rejected them.
 - (b) God persuaded him to go.
 - b) Now he is leading them, but they often challenge his leadership.
 - (1) He has handled it graciously.
 - (a) But this incident is pushing the limits of his graciousness.
 - (i) They *quarreled* (this implies a back and forth).
 - (ii) He is no longer identifying with them ("this people").
 - (iii) This is serious because he is their advocate before God.
 - (iv) If their one and only advocate will not advocate, what hope do they have?
- F. God prescribes an action that will reconfirm Moses' God-given authority.
- 1. Before the people
 - 2. Take the elders
 - 3. Take the staff
 - a) With which you struck the Nile
 - (1) This action associated the staff with judgment.
 - 4. God will stand before Moses.
 - 5. Strike the rock, and water will come out.

- a) Whereas before the water of the Nile was made undrinkable, this striking brings forth water.
- b) Precious, life-giving water poured forth from the same place where they soon after received the law (Horeb).
- 6. Moses did as he was told.
- 7. This was for the people and for Moses.
 - a) It reestablished Moses' authority to lead.
 - b) It reestablished Moses as leader of his people.
- G. Place named
 - 1. Massah—test
 - 2. Meribah—quarrel
 - 3. Is the Lord among us or not?
 - a) This is the issue behind their actions.
 - b) How can they question this after all that God has done?
- H. This story has a similar event in Numbers 20:1-13.
 - 1. Very similar scenario
 - a) Place is called Meribah.
 - 2. On the basis of what happened here, Moses is not allowed to go into Promised Land.
 - 3. But this story is different.
 - a) Different chronological and geographical context.
 - b) Some differences in detail of the story.
 - 4. We see the seeds of Moses' frustration with his people in Exodus.
 - a) It boils over in Numbers.

IV. Exodus 17:8-13

- A. Who were the Amalekites?
 - 1. Nomads in the Sinai
 - 2. Later tradition uses them as symbols of implacable enemies of Israel.
 - a) They preyed on the weak and vulnerable (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).
 - b) They may have done some of this already.
- B. The Amalekites came against them here.
 - 1. It is thought that they usually inhabited the area north of this mountainous area.
 - a) If so, they are out of their homeland.
 - 2. Fight over water?
 - a) It could be that this is a conflict over a very scarce and important resource.

3. This is the first time Israelites are required to fight.
- C. Moses appoints Joshua to select fighters.
 1. Joshua is signaled as Moses' successor.
 2. He will select the men who will fight.
 - a) Their job will be to fight.
 3. Moses will stand on a hill with staff in hand.
 - a) With Aaron and Hur
- D. Fight happens as prescribed.
 1. Joshua and his army fought against Amalekites.
 2. Moses, Aaron, and Hur stood on hill overlooking battle.
 - a) When Moses lowered his staff, Amalekites won.
 - b) When Moses raised his staff, Israel won.
 3. Aaron and Hur helped Moses keep the staff raised.
 - a) The staff is the symbol of God's power.
 - (1) All the miracles were enacted using the staff.
 - b) The fortunes of the military were entirely in God's power.
 - (1) The Israelites won when God was acting on their behalf.
- E. Two things emerge from this story:
 1. God not only helps the Israelites with respect to nature, he also helps them with respect to other people.
 - a) Success on the battle field is controlled by God.
 2. Moses can't do it all by himself.
 - a) Moses needs other people to help him provide leadership.

V. Exodus 17:14-16

- A. God is committed to wiping out Amalek.
 1. Write this in a book.
 2. Tell it to Joshua.
- B. Amalek is symbolic of any opponent that preys on the weak and vulnerable of God's people.
 1. God will destroy them.
- C. Moses built an altar and named it "The Lord is My Banner."
 1. God will lead and empower the war against his foes.
 2. He will wage this as long as there are people.
 3. This is a promise that God will protect his people from all those forces that would separate us from him and his people.

VI. Exodus 18:1-12

- A. Jethro comes to meet Moses.
 - 1. He is priest of Midian.
 - a) A descendant of Abraham
 - 2. He is the father-in-law of Moses.
 - 3. He has heard about the events in Egypt.
 - a) All God had done for Moses and his people
 - b) How YHWH had brought Israel out of Egypt
- B. Jethro brings Moses' wife and children.
 - 1. Moses had left his family in the care of Jethro while he went back to Egypt.
 - 2. Two sons
 - a) Gershom: "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."
 - (1) He was born before God appeared to Moses.
 - (2) Moses was alienated from Egypt, as he was from Israel.
 - b) Eliezer: "The God of my father was my help and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."
 - (1) Moses recognizes the continuity of his faith and experience from that of the patriarchs.
 - (2) YHWH delivered him from Pharaoh's wrath.
 - (a) He could have been born after Moses heard of the death of the Pharaoh who ruled when he fled from Egypt.
 - 3. Jethro came to meet Moses and bring his family to him.
 - a) He met them at the mountain of God.
 - (1) This appears to have been an area frequented by Jethro.
 - b) It was a joyous reunion.
 - (1) They asked each other about how they were doing.
 - c) They had a long conversation.
 - (1) Moses told Jethro about all that had happened.
 - (a) Including all the hardship
 - (b) And God's deliverance
 - d) Jethro blesses YHWH.
 - (1) YHWH is greater than all the gods.
 - (2) He proved his power when he came to the rescue of his people who were being treated oppressively and arrogantly by the Pharaoh and his gods.
 - (3) Jethro worshipped YHWH together with Moses and the elders.

VII. Conclusion

- A. Contrast between Amalekites and Jethro
 - 1. Amalekites see no good in the Israelites.
 - a) They are a threat.
 - (1) They will drain resources.
 - b) They are a potential source of wealth.
 - (1) The stragglers are easy prey.
 - 2. Amalekites see nothing remarkable in their story.
 - 3. Jethro is attracted.
 - a) He has heard some stories and is intrigued.
 - b) He wants to hear all the details.
 - c) He recognizes that YHWH is not just another god.
 - d) He recognizes that the Israelites have a special relationship with YHWH.
 - e) He wants to identify with the Israelites.
- B. These two responses have continued throughout history.
 - 1. How one responds to the Jews says much about how one responds to God.