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C0622 – May 31, 2006 – Ex 17:8-18:27 – God's Provision For War & Wisdom

D. The Provision for War at Rephidim (17:8-16)

Exodus 17:8 Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim.

⁹ So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand."

¹⁰ Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

¹¹ So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed.

¹² But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set.

¹³ So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."

¹⁵ Moses built an altar and named it The LORD is My Banner;

¹⁶ and he said, "The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation."

v. 8. At the same location where God provided water from the rock, the army of Amalek **came and fought against Israel**. The Amalekites were descendants of Abraham.ⁱ Apparently, they wanted "to secure their territory from intrusion" (BKC). This is the first of many battles in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

v. 9. **So, Moses said to Joshua**, here mentioned for the first time in the Bible. His name means "the Lord is Salvation" and is the Hebrew equivalent of Jesus. Before Moses died he appointed Joshua as his successor and he lead Israel in her conquest of the Promised

Land. At this early age he was already a top military general as signified by the fact that **Moses** chose him to **Choose men for Israel to go out and fight against Amalek.**

Apparently guerilla attacks were carried out on the stragglers near the rear that day and a full-scale battle would occur the next day. So, Joshua was to get an army ready. And on the next day Moses would do his part too, **stationing himself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in his hand.**

v. 10. So, **Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek.** Joshua respected authority and obeyed authority. **Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.** We already know **Moses** and his older brother **Aaron**, but we know little about **Hur**. Apparently he was the son of Caleb, not the famous Caleb who is introduced later, but an important man in Israel. Josephus said he was the husband of Miriam.

v. 11. **So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed.** It is difficult to know how the raising of the staff procured God's help. Most commentators relate it to prayer. For example, Keil and Delitzsch say, "The lifting up of the staff secured to the warriors the strength needed to obtain the victory, from the fact that by means of the staff Moses brought down the strength from above, i.e., from the Almighty God in heaven; not indeed by a merely spiritless and unthinking elevation of the staff, but by the power of his prayer, which was embodied in the lifting up of his hands with the staff...As long as Moses held up the staff, he drew down from God victorious powers for the Israelites by means of his prayer; but when he let it fall through the exhaustion of the strength of his hands, he ceased to draw down the power of God, and Amalek gained the upper hand" (Keil and Delitzsch, 372-3).

v. 12. **But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set.** Because of the weariness of holding an object over one's head for even a few minutes Moses sat down and Aaron and Hur supported his hands. And they kept **his hands steady until the sun set.** If this passage is about what prayer can procure through two or three then it is very suggestive of the NT verse "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst" (Matt 18:20). As long as Moses hands remained raised the Lord's power was evident. When they fell it was evident His power had departed. Because of the difficulty if not impossibility of Moses holding his hands up for hours in prayer, the help of two others contributed significantly. From the NT it seems that Jesus had trained His

disciples to pray for the minimum of one hour yet they often failed by falling asleep (and Jesus rebuked them).

v. 13 And so, since Moses maintained fervent and persistent prayer with arms raised, **Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.** Yet, they could not conquer by sword alone, but only by the power of God coming down from heaven and obtained through prayer. The means by which such power was conducted to him was the raised staff. In the Battle of Rephidim God had not promised miraculous help and so Moses sought for it by lifting up his hands with the staff in prayer to God, that he might secure the help of YHWH for His struggling people (Keil & Delitzsch, 373). From this Israel learned as an infant nation that in all her conflicts with the ungodly powers of this world, strength for the victory could only be gained through the lifting up of its hands in prayer to God. **And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.**

v. 14. **Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."** Now, many critical scholars who hold to the evolution of written language doubt whether Moses could **write**. But here it is quite clear that he could. Moses recorded what happened in the ancient Hebrew tongue **in a book** (i.e. scroll) which served **as a memorial**. And he was to **recite this to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven**. Amalek had been defeated on that day but her attack upon God's chosen people sealed her extermination as a people; they would be **utterly blotted out of memory**. This is the outworking of Gen 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse." The heathen nations were commencing their conflict with the people of God, a centuries long conflict of hatred that continues today. Since the Amalekites lived in the southern land of Canaan which was a part of the Promised Land, this was to be recited **to Joshua** so he would remember to destroy them. According to Dt 25:17-18, the Amalekites attacked Israel when they were "weary and worn out" and used guerilla warfare on the stragglers near the rear. For this reason they were known as "the first among the nations" to wage war against God's people and thus they would reap total destruction (Numb 14:20). "Israel next met them when she attempted to penetrate Canaan from the south (Numb 14:39-45)" (Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 80). Later God commanded Israel to exterminate the Amalekites after they enjoyed rest in Canaan (Dt 25:19). They failed to do so. During the time of the judges the Amalekites joined both the Moabites (Judg 3:13) and the Midianites (Judg 6:3). Saul failed to annihilate them as he was commanded (1 Sam 15:1-9), but David attacked and destroyed many of them in his desert expeditions (1 Sam 27:8; ch 30). The last clear

reference to them comes from Hezekiah's time ~ 700BC (1 Chron 4:41-43). However, some scholars think that Amalekites survived until the time of Esther and Mordecai (~470BC) because their adversary Haman was an Agagite (Esth 7:10; 9:7-10) and one of the kings of the Amalekites was named Agag (1 Sam 15:32-33). Though some commentators cast serious doubt on this identification the Amalekites were a constant thorn in Israel's side until they were eliminated from history.

v. 15. **Moses built an altar and named it The LORD is My Banner.** Jehovah-Nissi. After a battle is won the victors carry their flag across the field. On the flag is a sign or distinguishing mark. That's what this is talking about. The LORD is My sign or distinguishing mark. In commemoration of this victory **Moses built an altar** to the Lord **and** gave it this name since it was truly His victory. The Israelites had nothing to glory in save the Lord Almighty. When Israel depended upon God's strength and not the strength of the flesh God ensured victory.

v. 16. **and he said, "The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation."** Since Amalek was first among the nations to attack Israel, God's chosen people, then **the LORD swore** that he would **have war against Amalek from generation to generation.** The Hebrew literally reads, "Because a hand is lifted up against the throne of YHWH, YHWH will have war against Amalek". This was an attack on YHWH's throne since one from the tribe of Judah would sit on YHWH's throne (Gen 49:10). Thus, YHWH would enter holy war with Amalek and fight for His own reputation, purposes, and name. Holy war is always decisive and total. So, when God's cup of anger reached the brim Amalek would be blotted out of memory.

Lessons we can learn from the Battle of Rephidim

First, Moses needed the help of two others to sustain him physically and to procure his prayer. Do you come together with other believers in prayer to sustain one another and to procure God's answer? "For where two or three have gathered in My name, I am there in their midst."

Second, Moses prayer was fervent and persistent, lasting hours. Do you offer fervent, persistent prayers as the means of procuring God's answer? The NT insists that fervent and persistent prayer is necessary to procuring God's answer. Fervent means you are "eager" to have it answered. God is not likely to answer prayers offered half-heartedly or absent-mindedly. Persistent means you refuse to give up, you keep asking God for

something. The child who really wants a certain favor from his father will give him no rest until he gets it or learns that it is not his father's will for him to have it.

Third, YHWH was the distinguishing mark of Israel. Is Christ your distinguishing mark? Where does your ultimate loyalty reside? Is it Christ or yourself? It should be clear where your loyalty resides. Can you say that He is your Banner?

Fourth, victory came to Israel through depending on the power of God's Spirit and not the power of the flesh. Do you depend on the Spirit or the flesh to defeat your enemies (Eph 6:12ff)?

"In all the crises the Israelites had faced since they left Egypt, God was teaching them to look to Him. They should do so for deliverance from their enemies (at the Red Sea), for health and healing (at Marah), and for food and guidance (in the wilderness of Sin). They should also do so for water and refreshment (at Massah-Meribah) and for victory over their enemies (at Rephidim). He was teaching them how dependent they were on Him and that they should turn to Him in any and every need (cf. John 15:5)" (Constable, 90).

E. God's Provision of Wisdom (18:1-27)

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, visits Moses at Mt Sinai and gives wisdom.

1. The Visit of Jethro (18:1-12)

Exodus 18:1 Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.

² Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife Zipporah, after he had sent her away,

³ and her two sons, of whom one was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."

⁴ The other was named Eliezer, for *he said*, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."

⁵ Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mount of God.

⁶ He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her."

7 Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare (*shalom*) and went into the tent.

8 Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and *how* the LORD had delivered them.

9 Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians.

10 So Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, *and* who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.

11 "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people."

12 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law before God.

This section is very interesting and has a close parallel in Gen 14-15 with the story of Melchizedek, king of Salem.ⁱⁱ

Gen 14-15	Exod 18-20
Melchizedek met Abram	Jethro met Moses
Melchizedek was a priest	Jethro was a priest
Melchizedek was priest of Salem ("peaceful")	Jethro sought Salom ("peace")
Melchizedek praised God for rescuing Abram	Jethro praised God for rescuing Moses
Melchizedek brought out wine and bread to eat	Jethro ate with Moses and Aaron
Melchizedek met with Abram before God made a covenant with Abram (Gen 15)	Jethro met with Moses before God made a covenant with Moses (Exod 20)
Abram's heir was named Eliezer ("God is my help")	Moses had a son named Eliezer ("God is my help")
Abram was told he would be a <i>ger</i> ("sojourner")	Moses other son was named Gershom (sojourner)

*The purpose of these parallels appears to be to cast Jethro as another Melchizedek, the paradigm of the righteous Gentile. It is important that Jethro have such credentials

because he plays a major role in this chapter, instructing Moses, the lawgiver himself, how to carry out the administration of God's Law to Israel.

Now Jethroⁱⁱⁱ (Ex 3:1) was a descendant of Abraham (Gen 25:2) just as the Amalekites were descendants of Abraham. So, here we see two radically different responses to the Israelites by their blood relatives. Amalek brought war and Jethro brought peace (18:8). And **Jethro was priest of Midian, and father-in-law of Moses**, for he had given his eldest daughter Zipporah ("bird") to Moses after he fled Egypt and arrived in Midian at the age of 40. And Jethro had **heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt**. In other words, the word had gotten out about God's works for Moses and Israel and was spreading through the grapevine. An uncontrollable story of how a lowly shepherd named Moses had become the highly esteemed leader of Israel and how ~ two million Hebrew slaves had become the free nation of Israel. How marvelous are the works of God! Some stories really are worth telling! And most of them are in the Bible!

² Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Moses' wife Zipporah, after he had sent her away. Now, we know from this verse that Moses' family did not travel with him all the way to Egypt for here they are coming with Jethro to meet Moses at Mt Sinai. You might recall how Moses set out for Egypt with his wife and sons but apparently he sent them back before they arrived. This probably happened at the lodging place in...

Exodus 4:24-26 Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. ²⁵ Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me." ²⁶ So He let him alone. At that time she said, "*You are a bridegroom of blood*"-- because of the circumcision.

Now, apparently the one the LORD sought to put to death was the son of Moses not Moses! The reason was because he was uncircumcised and thus had not entered into the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 17:1, 9-14). In the original text on circumcision Abram and his descendants were commanded to circumcise their sons on the eighth day. If they didn't their sons stood in violation of the Abrahamic Covenant and would be cut off from the people, that is, they would be physically killed (cf Dan 9:26). So, Zipporah circumcised him on the spot and apparently Moses sent her back to Midian before he went to Egypt. So, Moses gained first-hand experience of the importance of obeying God's commands. If he was to be the lawgiver at Mt Sinai how could he stand in such a blatant state of disobedience?

PRINCIPAL: Moses' disobedience was confronted by God before he could serve as a leader of Israel. Are you men fit to serve as leaders of the Church? Leaders must not only talk the talk but walk the walk. This includes having control of their families as here (1 Tim 3), having them in a state of obedience. This does not mean the prospective elder's children must be believers. No one can guarantee the salvation of anyone else. That would be a total misreading of *pistewo* in 1 and 2 Timothy where it should always be rendered "faithful". The requirement for elders is that their children be faithful to their fathers, in subjection to their fathers, in obedience to their fathers. So, if the leader of the family can't rule his own family well then how is he ever going to take care of the church of God? Do you have control of your household in all seriousness?

And so, now Jethro is coming to escort Moses' family back to him. Both of Moses' sons were named after circumstances in his life. **Gershom** ("I am a sojourner") is named for his sojourning in the foreign land of Midian. **Eliezer** ("God is my help) is named for the time when God helped him escape the sword of Pharaoh after he had killed the Egyptian. ⁵ **Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mount of God.** The **mount of God** is Mt Sinai (aka Mt Horeb) where the Mosaic Law will be revealed in chapter 20. ⁶ **He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her."** ⁷ **Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him.** A common greeting in the ancient world akin to shaking hands today. **and they asked each other of their welfare (*shalom*) and went into the tent.** But the Hebrew text indicates that they both sought "peace" with one another. The Hebrew word here translated **welfare** is *shalom*. Amalek had sought "war" but Jethro sought "peace". ⁸ **Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and how the LORD had delivered them.** Jethro knew the generalities of what God had done (cf 18:1) but **Moses** filled him in on all the details. And Moses considered all the acts of the LORD thus far as deliverances. "Moses' summary [vv. 8-10] is a proof-of-Presence summary, a confession of Yahweh's powerful protection of and provision for Israel" (Durham, 244). ⁹ **Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians.** ¹⁰ **So Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD who delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.** So, Jethro was a God-fearing Gentile, one of a small group of believers in the one true God from Midian. ¹¹ **"Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly**

against the people." ¹² Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law before God. "Eating together in the ancient Near East was a solemn occasion because it constituted the establishment of an alliance between the parties involved" (Constable, 91). The alliance here was an alliance of peace between the Midianites and the Israelites.

2. The Judgments of Moses (18:13-18)

¹³ It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening.

¹⁴ Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit *as judge* and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?"

¹⁵ Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God.

¹⁶ "When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws." ¹⁷ Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good.

¹⁸ "You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.

Several things are presupposed in this account. *First*, that there was already some body of law revealed (18:16; possibly 15:26).^{iv} Either some small body of law revealed *before* Mt Sinai or the narrative is out of sequence and this chapter actually occurred after the great body of Law revealed *at* Mt Sinai. *Second*, keep in mind that there are ~ 2 million people over which Moses is sitting as judge.

Now, Jethro observed Moses from morning until evening and saw that this was **not good**. It was not good for **Moses** or the **people**, **both** would **surely wear out**. So, what Jethro observed was inefficient administration and the danger of burn-out with all the accompanying stress and frustrations. **Moses** was overloaded with work and as a result he would eventually **wear out** under the heavy load. The **people** would become frustrated because their cases would be put on hold for weeks due to a jammed court system. So, Jethro, in his wisdom suggests that he **cannot do it alone**. Moses may be a highly esteemed leader but his administrative skills needed some work.

PRINCIPAL: Moses took on a workload that was too heavy for him. Moses was an inefficient administrator. Moses was headed for burn-out. They were all headed for stress and frustration. Have you taken on a workload that is too heavy for you? The mindset that goes along with this is that if it's going to be done right I've got to do it myself. Some people have a difficult time delegating. Are you an inefficient administrator? Failure to delegate is a sign of inefficiency as an administrator. The inevitable end of such a path is "burn-out" with all the accompanying stress and frustrations that result from the friction between you and others. Now, is this you? I'm sure my wife is sitting out there pointing the finger at me. This all points to a lack of wisdom in the area of administration. "Mr. [Dwight L.] Moody said shrewdly: It is better to set a hundred men to work, than do the work of a hundred men. You do a service to a man when you evoke his latent faculty. It is no kindness to others or service to God to do more than your share in the sacred duties of Church life."

ⁱ The Amalekites were Semitic descendants of Esau, Jacob's older twin brother (Gen 36:12). And as Jacob and Esau struggled in the womb (Gen 25:22) so here their descendants continued to struggle.

ⁱⁱ Sailhammer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 280-281.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jethro is also known as Reuel (Ex 2:16-22), Jether (Ex 4:18), and Hobab (Numb 10:29; Judg 4:11).

^{iv} Either some body of law was revealed before Mt Sinai or this narrative is out of sequence and they had already received the Law at Mt Sinai.

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