

Exodus 17:8 – 18:27

^{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.’

^{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 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. 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. ¹⁹ Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people’s representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, ²⁰ then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. ²¹ Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²² Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. ²³ If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace.’ ²⁴ So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. ²⁵ Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. ²⁶ They judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge. ²⁷ Then Moses bade his father-in-law farewell, and he went his way into his own land.

The Lesson of Fighting Israel's Battle: Exodus 17:8 – 16

- A. Amalek comes to fight against Israel in Rephidim (17:8)
 - B. Moses gives the strategy to Joshua (17:9 – 10)
 - C. Moses' inability to keep his hands raised on the mountain brings defeat in the valley (17:11)
 - D. Moses' hands are heavy (17:12a)
 - E. A stone is placed under Moses to support his weight (17:12b)
 - E'. Aaron and Hur support his hands (17:12c)
 - D'. Moses' hands are "steady" until the sunset (17:12d)
 - C'. Joshua overwhelms Amalek in the valley (17:13)
 - B'. The Lord commands Moses to inscribe a memorial and recite it to Joshua (17:14)
- A'. God's vow to war with Amalek in every generation (17:15 – 16)

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Rephidim* may mean 'supports' in Hebrew but that association might be after the fact of this event.
- *Amalek* was the son of Eliphaz and his concubine Timna; Eliphaz was a son of Esau (Gen.36:11 – 12; 1 Chr.1:36), brother of Jacob. Thus, the Amalekites are distant relations to those of Abraham's physical lineage. But they attack the most vulnerable among the Israelites without provocation. Later, Moses recalls that they 'attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God' (Dt.25:18).
- *Jethro* was also called 'Reuel' (Ex.2:18; Num.10:29) meaning 'friend of God' and possibly 'Hobab' (Judg.4:11) meaning 'beloved.' Moses and Zipporah's two sons were Gershom, meaning 'sojourner,' and Eliezer meaning 'God is my helper.'
- *Wise Judgment Among God's People*: Sharing in God's judicial responsibility goes back to God's original commission to human beings to have 'dominion' (Gen.1:26 – 28). God shared His judicial responsibility with Moses, and then with other elders in Israel (Ex.18; Dt.1:9 – 17; 16:18 – 22) and, in some ways, the whole community (Dt.13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:9, 21; 22:21; 24:7; cf. Judg.20:13). The prophet Daniel (Dan.7:22) envisioned 'the Son of Man' being enthroned, and sharing his judicial authority with his people (Dan.7:27). Jesus as 'Son of Man' shares his authority to render wise judgment with leaders among his people using his norms of fairness, justice, and wisdom (Mt.19:28; Jn.5:22, 26; 1 Cor.6:2 – 3; 2 Pet.2:4; Jude 6; Rev.20:4).

Questions

1. Why is Moses so important to the battle?
 - a. Hands represented authority and dominion (Ex.2:18). God represented His hand metaphorically by Moses' physical hand. God stretched out His hand to strike Egypt and deliver Israel (Ex.3:20; 7:4 – 5). God had told Moses to stretch out his hand towards the Red Sea to make a pathway in it (Ex.14:16) and then again to close it over the Egyptian pursuers (Ex.14:21). God also used Aaron's hand (e.g. Ex.8:5 – 6) during the plagues. The right hand especially connoted power and strength (Ex.15:6, 9, 12).
 - b. How come God works through Moses so much? Because he is faithful to God and represents the people as well.
 - c. As Moses gets older, how do we see his limitations more? Is this important to the story? We will even see more of this in Exodus 18.
 - i. Moses' hands needed to be lifted up by Aaron and Hur.
 - ii. Moses' role as judge needs to be shared by others
 - d. God will appoint others to take Moses' place. Ultimately, we will need someone who can stand for us, who doesn't get tired...Jesus!
2. Why does Jethro seem to play an important role in this story?
 - a. He exemplifies a Gentile who helps the Jewish people, who has wisdom and is strategically smart. That's important to establish because he stands in contrast to Pharaoh who did not believe God/Moses and tried to obstruct God's purposes.
 - b. He also is a counterexample of Laban as father-in-law to Jacob. He is a kind, wise, honest, God-fearing father-in-law. He believes in God, rejoices in the goodness of God (Ex.18:9), and praises the LORD for being greater than all other gods (Ex.18:11). It's touching that he eats a meal with Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel (Ex.18:12). So he is in full fellowship with them as demonstrated by the meal. This is important as it speaks extra well of Zipporah as Moses' wife.
 - c. Other examples of Gentiles who believed in the God of Israel:
 - i. The mixed multitude (Ex.12:38) left Egypt with Israel, having done the Passover rite with the Israelites.
 - ii. All the wives of the twelve sons of Jacob were descended from other people; Judah's wife was a Canaanite, as was his daughter-in-law Tamar (Gen.38); Joseph's wife Asenath was an Egyptian (Gen.41:45).
 - iii. Melchizedek, king of Salem (Gen.14:18 – 20) believed and was blessed by Abram
 - d. Jethro is strategically smart and gives sound advice to Moses. He helps Moses delegate and set up a system of co-administrators of God's justice. The story suggests the 'wisdom' is not totally absent from the Gentiles. Israel may have more of it, but Jethro had good suggestions for Moses and Israel.
 - e. There is another incident in Numbers 11 where Moses gets tired and despairs of the people. In response, the Lord takes the Spirit that rested upon Moses and shared it with 70 other elders, plus 2 other men named Eldad and Medad, who all prophesied (Num.11:11 – 30). This was to help Moses set the spiritual climate of the community. But the principle is that Moses could not do it all by himself.
 - f. Illus: Early in the life of Rescued Church Boston, Rick and his dad Rick Sr. were leading the church. The church opened its doors to the public in September 2013. Rick Sr. passed away suddenly in November of 2013. Rick Jr. carried on for a few months and then came to Turhan, Paul, and me to ask if we would help him with the leadership. And it's been absolutely fun!
 - g. Application: Do you tend to overcommit and make yourself indispensable?
 - h. Application: Can you play a helping role somewhere among God's people?
3. Wait, so Moses had God's laws and statutes (18:16, 20) before the Ten Commandments were given in Ex.19? Interesting!
 - a. Why would that be significant? Where did Moses learn of these statutes and laws? From the creation order! They were passed down to him. They did not just come from Sinai.
 - b. Illus: my wife and I do marriage counseling quite often
 - c. Reread the historical and cultural background note on *Wise Judgment*. As followers of Jesus, we are meant to understand the teaching of Jesus and the principles of relationship and restoration that he maintains.

- d. Illus: Christians in the Roman Empire bringing about more rights for slaves, women, and children of all classes. (Source: The Catholic website New Advent, *Influence of the Church on Civil Law*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09066a.htm>)
- i. Slavery: I did a lot of research on slavery and how Christians were emancipators and abolitionists starting from the beginning. They recognized the human dignity of the enslaved person, marriage between enslaved persons, granted freedom, etc. Eventually Constantine changed certain key laws about slavery: <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-slavery-and-christianity-1st-to-15th-centuries.pdf>.
 - ii. Children: According to the Roman law the power of the father over his children was as absolute as that of the master over his slaves: it extended to their freedom and life. Emperor Theodosius declared that killing a child was one of the greatest of crimes. Cruel treatment of children was forbidden. Children could not be sold or given away to the power of others. Children sold by their father on account of poverty were to be set free. And all children exposed by their parents and fallen into servitude were to become free without exception.
 - iii. Women: In the ancient law of Rome the wife was, like the rest of the family, the property of the husband, who could dispose of her at will. Christians, however, attributed to women equal rights. Emperor Theodosius gave women the right of controlling their property, and to mothers the right of guardianship. Later, Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora gave wives the right to charge their husbands of adultery and initiate divorce proceedings, and protected women from going to prison where male guards would probably rape them, made adultery not punishable by death.
 - iv. This went all the way back to Genesis 1 – 11, if you studied it in a literary form. It's the first ever statement of universal human dignity. Every human being is precious to God and beloved by God because each person is created in His image.
- e. Application: I'm assuming that you don't already play these kinds of roles yet. But I think it's wise to prepare yourself for that. You may want to consider reading one of the following essays or listening to a talk:
- i. A tool for healthy reconciliation from Peacemaker Ministries, *A Practical Framework for Reconciliation*: <http://nagasawafamily.org/matthew-theme-reconciliation.pdf>
 - ii. A 35 minute talk I gave called *The Heart of Restorative Justice in the Heart of the Christian God*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaGB8SB3edI>
 - iii. A short teaching and action module called *Genesis 1 – 11 and the Foundation of Human Dignity*, <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-christian-restorative-justice-curriculum-ch2.pdf>
 - iv. My paper, *Human Dignity: Does Every Human Being Matter?* <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-human-dignity.pdf>
 - v. Maybe read it with a few other people. And then consider taking some action!