

# BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

*"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger ..." John 6:35*

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## EXODUS 18-20

The momentous events surrounding Israel's deliverance from Egypt and numerous vital lessons learned in wilderness were preparation for the momentous meeting with the LORD at Sinai. There the LORD will descend amidst thunder, lightning, smoke and fire and deliver the Ten Commandments. But before this historic event, we find a seemingly superfluous and out of place section bringing Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, into focus again.

### CHAPTER 18 – Jethro

**Read verses 1-12** Jethro<sup>1</sup> had heard how God had blessed Moses and his kinsmen by delivering them from their oppression in Egypt, and he travelled to Rephidim, along with Moses' wife Zipporah and 'her' two sons Gershom and Eliezer.

We are reminded that the first son, Gershom, was named "for he said, I have been a stranger in a foreign land"; and in verse 4 the second son, Eliezer, is named here for the first time,<sup>2</sup> meaning "God is help". Keep this in mind as we continue to look at the encounter with Jethro.

The two met on extremely friendly terms—Moses prostrated himself and kissed Jethro and told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done since they had parted, including the hardships along the way, to which Jethro responds, "Blessed be the LORD who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians .... Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods" and he brought an elevation offering and other sacrifices to God and they sat down and ate bread together.<sup>3</sup> Here Jethro becomes the first person to pronounce the words "Blessed be the LORD...", words which have become intrinsic to Jewish daily prayer. (The many Jewish liturgical blessings generally begin with the words: "Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe..." Christians are also exhorted to give thanks in all circumstances, 1 Thess 5:18)

On reading these verses, we are urged to ask why the phrase "*father-in-law of Moses*" is repeated so often,<sup>4</sup> and also why Zipporah & "her" sons are mentioned **three times** (v.2,5 & 6) and named—then ignored! One of the ways the Torah teaches its message is through seemingly "useless" information, including repetition of certain words and/or phrases, and this is a classic example.

**Q. What are your thoughts on these two questions?**<sup>5</sup>

**Read 13-23 - What is Jethro's role in this section?**

We see that Moses shows Jethro great respect and honour throughout; he heeds his Father-in-law's advice and does everything he advises (v.24). Jethro's advice was that the people of

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<sup>1</sup> "Yitro" means His Excellence or abundance; denoting an 'excess' or 'addition'. Thus it is said his name also means "he added" (to the Torah).

<sup>2</sup> Eliezer was the name of the servant of Abraham – depicted as a 'type' of Holy Spirit in Gen. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Midrash says that this feast was celebrated in honour of Jethro's conversion to the One true God.

<sup>4</sup> The Term *father-in-law* is repeated eleven times in this chapter. Heb. *chatan* denotes relationship through the contract of marriage, therefore doesn't specifically mean father-in-law.

<sup>5</sup> Father/Son (Jethro, the father of Moses' gentile wife, is also his Father-in-law)

Israel learn to govern themselves, to arbitrate their disputes, to apply the laws of Torah to their lives. While Moses was to remain the sole source of these laws, their implementation was to be achieved by the appointment of “captains of thousand, captains of hundred, captains of fifty and captains of ten”. His advice was accepted and implemented by Moses, and written into the Torah, making it an integral part of the divine communication to man. This way, the divine law would permeate their lives on every level. Torah would remain something that Moses had empowered them to attain, but Jethro’s system made the Torah the personal achievement of every Jew.

**Q. Consider why Jethro was the initiator of this idea, rather than God speaking directly to Moses?**

The Torah is given totally within the context of law and justice. Thus, the giving of the Ten Commandments is preceded by a chapter concerning the establishment of the institution of justice. Jewish commentary says that the world stands on three things: justice, truth & peace. Truth and justice are two distinct pillars upon which the world stands, and help maintain the balance in the world.<sup>6</sup> “When people are confident that they are ruled justly, they are at peace, free from resentment and frustration ... for with justice comes contentment.”<sup>7</sup>

**Q. Discuss justice, truth and peace in relation to the role of Yeshua.**

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne;  
love and faithfulness go before you.  
Psalm 89:14

## **CHAPTER 19 – The LORD Descends**

The seven weeks following the Exodus were a period of mental and spiritual purification for Israel—a time to learn valuable lessons which would strengthen their faith and trust in the LORD in readiness to enter into Covenant relationship with Him at Sinai, and receive the supreme gift of the Torah.

The term “in the wilderness” is repeated three times in the first two verses of ch.19. In Scripture, *the wilderness* is always a place of encounter with God. Having severely weakened the Amalekites (the old flesh nature) they arrived at the foot of the mountain as one man with one heart: *‘Israel (singular) encamped ... opposite the mountain’* – When Moses encountered the LORD at the burning bush he was told that one day the Israelites would worship Him at this same mountain. The revelation of YHWH was given to Moses at this very place, when he was shepherding sheep for Jethro. Now Moses, the shepherd, has returned with the Father’s ‘flock’, and the people he leads are about to encounter Him for themselves.

This new nation was being shaped and moulded into the antithesis of what they were in Egypt. In Egypt they were a bunch of slaves. Now they would cease to be individuals and instead would become a nation, united under the sovereignty of the Almighty, whose written constitution is the Torah and whose mission is to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation”:

Exodus 19:5 *‘Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.*

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<sup>6</sup> *Pirkei Avot* 1:18

<sup>7</sup> Stones Chumash commentary, p.399.

This refers back to Exodus 6:6-8 —the five ‘I wills’ where the LORD’S plan for fulfilling the promises to the Patriarchs was outlined. We are now at the fourth “I will” —*I will take you as My people, and I will be your God.*

v.6 *And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.*

**Q. What does it mean to be a ‘Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation?’**

Through this people, the LORD intends to become known to all humanity. He desires to use them to bring His light to the world, **so that** He can redeem humanity through His presence among them. But, there is a condition – *if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then...*

In the NT, Peter makes reference to these verses:

1 Pet. 2:5 *Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, **to be a holy priesthood** to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

1 Pet. 2:9 *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

**Q. To whom is Peter writing and how does that relate to Ex. 19:5-6?**

This amazing truth has enormous far reaching consequences, as John relates in Revelation: *You have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.* (Rev. 5:10). How seriously do we take this?

When Moses related the words of God to the people, reminding them of what God did to Egypt and that he has *borne them on wings of eagles*, the entire people responded together *“all that the LORD has spoken we will do!”* Note that these words are spoken in unison before any commandments are given. They have been lifted to a high spiritual level. They are ready and willing to enter into covenant relationship with their God... or are they?

**The Need for Preparation – read 19:10-15**

v.10 – *“The LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and they shall wash their clothing. LET THEM BE READY FOR THE THIRD DAY, for on the third day the LORD shall descend on Mt Sinai in the sight of all the people.”*

Use of the third day motif here is very significant.<sup>8</sup> In the symbolic language of the Bible, a three day period points to “an act of divine intervention which impacts Salvation History”<sup>9</sup> (see also Hos. 6:2), but also carries with it an expectation that challenges the people of God to live a life a holy life in obedience to His Torah, so that they are ready for the “third day”.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, Jesus was well aware of the significance of the third day, as we read in Matt 12:40; 17:22-23; 20:19; Mk 9:31; 10:34; Lk 9:22; 13:32-33; 24:46; and Jn 2:19, in reference to His crucifixion and resurrection.

**Q. Do you see Jesus’ death and resurrection as the culmination of the three day motif—or is there more to come?**

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<sup>8</sup> The number 3 points to divine perfection/completion.

<sup>9</sup> [www.agapebiblestudy.com/documents/](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/documents/)

<sup>10</sup> We should also take note of scriptures containing the words: “after two full days”, or suchlike.

**Read 19:16-25** Note the continuous ascending and descending as Moses mediates between God and the people. Where else in scripture do we read of ascending and descending?

*And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down (descended) from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven (John 3:13, perhaps also referring to Prov.30:4).*

The LORD descends amidst thunder, lightning, billowing smoke, fire and blasts of the shofar. Never before have we seen God revealing himself so powerfully and personally to His people. But they are **strongly warned** not to go up the mountain or even touch it, lest they perish.

**Q. Why must this separation exist? Who is able to ascend with Moses? (v.24)**

## Chapter 20 - The Ten Words

It was when Moses descended for the third time that “God spoke all these words.” The Torah actually speaks of ten *statements or words (dabarim)*. God’s purpose is that these “words” will form the mainstay of their lives, so that He can work through them. God is not just giving rules to obey, His words to them actually form a Covenant—a marriage contract (*ketubah*). Even if the entire Jewish people were to stray from their God and His Law, the “Ten Words” would remain eternal and untouched by their desertion.

*The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God shall stand forever. (Is.40:8)*

The *statements* below are in accordance with the numbering given by Judaism. Both Catholic and Protestant renderings are slightly different.<sup>11</sup>

1. ***I am the LORD your God, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.***
  - These words must not be seen as an independent set of rules distinct from the ‘person’ of the LORD himself and his grace-filled, redeeming work. And so he defines himself in these terms and not, for example, as the One who created heaven and earth?
2. ***You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath...***
  - Remember Israel lived in an extremely polytheistic world. Multiple gods was the norm, as were images of these gods. The effect of making an image of a god is to reduce that god to a work of human hands that one can manipulate and use for favour. Israel’s God is declaring that he is irreducible and beyond manipulation.
3. ***You shall not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.***
  - The word translated take actually means to lift up or carry. His Name is not to be used lightly, but is to be borne honourably; not tacked on to our personal agendas. e.g. Do not swear by the Name of God. (Lev. 19:12; Mt. 5:34; James 5:12)
4. ***Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy . . .***
  - This command is grounded in creation, therefore built into the very fabric of creation. There are six days to care for the provisions of life—every seventh day is to be a day of rest. A day to remember that our life is a gift from God and we belong to Him. Sabbath keeping ensures we maintain intimacy with Him who redeemed us and loves us.
5. ***Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land ...***
  - The first relationship we build is that with our parents. Our relationship with our parents is to be high on our priority list. The primary meaning of the word honour is heavy (*kabad*). It is a ‘heavy’ relationship. If we can’t get this relationship right, other

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.10commandmentslist.com/>

relationships will not work well. Honour to parents is still very important in many other cultures and flows out to the community. Notice that it comes with a promise, or result.

**6. You shall not murder.**

- This does not refer to war or capital punishment. The first murder was brother on brother. Jesus refers to this command in the Sermon on the Mount, lifting it to a heart level. In 1 John 3:15 we read, “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.”

**7. You shall not commit adultery**

- Faithfulness is of paramount importance for a healthy marriage. Without it all trust breaks down and it has a ripple effect to many. Marriage is also related to God’s calling His people into a betrothal relationship with Himself. (Eph.5)

**8. You shall not steal**

- This speaks to all levels of society and betrays lack of trust and respect of others.

**9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour**

- Words destroy. They should not be for sale, either for money or pride.

**10. You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey...**

- Coveting elevates our self-satisfaction, above our neighbours, brothers, even God Himself. One who covets displaces God from the centre of life, replacing God with “me”. When this last Commandment is broken, it will not be long before one or more of the others is broken also. Coveting betrays a jealous heart and lack of satisfaction with our lot in life.

The awesome presence of God was too much for the people and they drew back in fear and said to Moses, “You speak to us and we shall hear; let God not speak to us lest we die.” Moses attempts to ease their fears: “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.” This is the third test since leaving Egypt—but the people remained at a distance—they stood ‘afar off’ (remote, distant).

No matter how much we think we understand about the awesome holiness of God, we can never fully comprehend what it would be to come into His presence; consider the vision of Isaiah:

*I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple...  
And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.*

*So I said:*

*“Woe is me, for I am undone!*

*Because I am a man of unclean lips,*

*And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;*

*For my eyes have seen the King,*

*The Lord of hosts.” (Is. 6:1-5)*

**Discuss this test, and the people’s response.**

Paul picks up this fearsome event in his letter to the Hebrews and contrasts it to the establishment of the New Covenant, and the New-Covenant mountain—Mount Zion:

<sup>18</sup> *You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, <sup>19</sup> and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them.... But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... (Heb. 12:18,19)*

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom:  
and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Prov. 9:10

