

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Wednesday Morning Women’s Bible Study
Week #13

Exodus 17:8 – 18:27

January 10, 2024

Exodus 17:8-16

1. These next two stories continue the saga of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness with special emphasis on how the people are learning how to live in obedience to the God who saves
2. War with Amalek
 - a. This is the only instance in Exodus where Israel actually uses the weapons they brought with them from Egypt
 - b. The Amalekites are a nomadic people (not unlike the Israelites at this time!) who continue to appear in the biblical history as enemies of Israel
 - c. Even though Egypt is far behind and Pharaoh is defeated, there are still very clear and present dangers to Israel and thus to God’s plan
 - d. Here, not only is God’s direct intervention required, but also human leadership and community action
 - i. The working of God’s will sometimes is accomplished directly by God, acting alone
 - ii. And, sometimes it is accomplished in concert with human will and action
 - iii. Such work often takes time
 - e. Moses again uses his staff
 - i. The staff does not have “magic” power in and of itself
 - ii. It’s power here seems mostly to be as symbol to the people of God’s presence with them – to see the staff is to see God’s hand
 - f. Even the memory of Amalek is to be “blotted out” – yet, the history shared here has ironically preserved that very memory!
 - g. The “blotting out” is not so much about God’s anger against Amalek as it is about God’s larger plan to redeem the whole world, a plan that must not be delayed or denied
 - h. Eventually, Amalek is finally defeated (I Chron 4:43)
3. Of course, the war with Amalek is not the last that Israel will fight
4. Taken as a whole, the Bible tells of a continual battle between God and Evil that is only finally won by Jesus on the cross

Exodus 18:1-12

5. Here is a story about how Moses’ extended family hears of God’s work to save the people and their reaction to it
6. Overall, this is a story of how a family that was NOT part of the Exodus event itself is now integrated into the People of God
7. Note the progression of events:
 - a. Jethro (Moses’ father-in-law) hears the news of the deliverance (gospel!)
 - b. The family gathers and shares stories of life
 - c. They enter a tent – perhaps a tent used as a sanctuary
 - d. Moses tells the story of their “salvation” (the Exodus)
 - e. Jethro rejoices & gives thanks
 - f. Jethro confesses that Yahweh is God
 - g. Jethro presents an offering to God
8. The key to this story is Moses’ telling of the Good News
9. The people of Moses – both those who were literally with him and those who were “with him” in the bonds of family relationship – are beginning to form an identity and entity as a community, a people, a church even?, who know they have been claimed & rescued by God

Exodus 18:13-27

10. Here is a story of how God's people learn to use wisdom from the world around them in order better to organize and become the community of people who live according to God's will in the world
11. Moses is a great leader, but not a good administrator
12. Jethro (not a Jew, but now a person incorporated into the community, shares a way for things to work better – and this way is adopted as being within God's will and design
13. There is no special revelation here, no direct intervention from God, only God's people using God's gifts of intellect, reason, experience, and will, in order to accomplish goodness for God's people
14. Note Moses' continuing role: to teach the community about God's will and ways – this is the overarching context within which the community will have its life
15. From this story, and others in scripture, Presbyterians derive their system of governance for the church – employing the roles of those who teach and those who govern, the selection of proven leaders, the delegation of responsibility and authority, the use of representative governance, the recognition that no single person has every gift necessary to lead, and the insistence on no single person exercising absolute power
16. This very human and worldly story is followed by the people's encampment at Sinai and God's revelation of his law

Questions for Your Life Today

- A. Name some of the battles that God's people continually wage, and some that you personally must fight
- B. What serves as a "Moses' Staff" for you, a sign of God's presence and power?
- C. What lessons about leadership have you learned from Moses?
- D. How are your personal/blood related family and your faith family important in your walk with God?
- E. What gifts do you bring to the community? And how do you employ them?

Notes by The Rev. Dr. Jack Baca, Senior Pastor, The Village Church, Rancho Santa Fe, California

Resources:

- a. Interpretation Commentary on Exodus, Terence E. Fretheim, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1991
- b. The Communicator's Commentary Series, Old Testament, Exodus, Maxie D. Dunnam, Word, Inc., Waco, TX, 1987
- c. The Old Testament Library: Exodus, Brevard S. Childs, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1974