

RESPONSIBILITY OF MOSES

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Israel continued their journey through the wilderness until the LORD brought them to Rephidim where they were tested twice. The first testing at Rephidim was caused by the lack of water. The thirsty Israelites failed to trust in the LORD, but railed on Moses in unbelief. They excoriated Moses for his foolhardy plan to take them out of Egypt into the wilderness. Moses appealed to the LORD and received instructions as to what to do. The LORD told him to strike a certain rock and an abundant supply of water gushed forth from the rock to meet all of their needs.

The next testing came at the hands of the Amalekites when they attacked Israel. Moses called on Joshua to lead the armies of Israel against Amalek and he promised to hold the rod of God toward heaven. The LORD caused Israel to prevail as long as Moses held the rod toward heaven, but when his hands became tired and he lowered the rod, Amalek prevailed. Aaron and Hur seated Moses on a rock and helped Moses hold his hands toward heaven until Israel had gained the victory.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law received word as to the location of the Israelites' camp and brought Moses' wife and sons to join them. Moses had sent his family back to Jethro when he went to tell Pharaoh the LORD'S demand (4:24-26). When Jethro heard of the mighty acts of the LORD, he offered a burnt offering with the words, "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods" (18:11). As Jethro observed the daily routine which Moses endured, he showed his administrative wisdom when he proposed a division of labor. This plan was later adopted by Moses (Deut 1:15-17; cf. Num 11:16, 17).

Israel finally arrived at Sinai in the third month after they left Egypt. There the LORD invited them to enter into a covenant relationship with Him. This covenant was based on His own deliverance of Israel (19:4) and dependent upon Israel's obedience (19:5). The provisions of the covenant were three-fold: (1) "You shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me;" (2) "You shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests;" and (3) You shall be unto Me "an holy nation" (19:5, 6). Before the covenant could be consummated the LORD'S holiness demanded complete sanctification of the people. The awesome events surrounding the establishment of this covenant were designed to give Israel a deep reverence for the Law as well as the Lawgiver.

I. Water from the Rock — 17:1-7

17:1 — "Rephidim" - The name means "resting places." Rephidim cannot be located for certain, but it was probably located on the wadi Rephayid which is just a short distance from Mt. Sinai.

17:2 — "The people did chide" - Literally, they "quarreled." This is not the first time they openly murmured and complained (14:11, 12; 15:24; 16:2, 3).

"Wherefore do you tempt the Lord?" — Israel frequently tried God's patience by her unbelief. This became the sin which characterized her sojourn in the wilderness (Ps 78:56; 95:8, 9).

17:4 — "They are almost ready to stone me" - This is the first Biblical record of stoning. No doubt Moses sincerely felt his life was endangered by the angry mob. Contrary to the rest of the nation, his normal reflex was to appeal for the LORD's help in every crisis.

17:5 — "Go on before the people" - Moses was instructed to take the elders and depart from the congregation proper, possibly for his own safety. The miracle was to be attested by the elders only, since the congregation was unworthy.

17:7 — "Massah and Meribah" - Literally, it means "temptation and strife."

II. War with the Amalekites — 17:8-16

The Amalekites were descendants of Amalek, the grandson of Esau (Gen 36:12). They had become a large and powerful tribe, exercising control of the entire desert region between Egypt and Palestine. No

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doubt the Amalekites viewed Israel as a threat to their summer pasture lands since the area around Rephidim was cooler and supported sufficient vegetation for grazing during the hottest months. They attacked Israel's army from the rear at a time when it was travel-weary (Deut. 25:18).

17:9 — The Israelites were slaves and brick makers, not a highly trained and well-equipped army. Joshua was commissioned by Moses to lead the nation to battle. His name "Hoshea" means "savior," and was later changed to "Jehoshua," meaning "Yahweh (the LORD) is savior" (Num 13:16). For forty years he served as personal minister to Moses (24:3; 32:17; 33:11; Josh 1:1). He proved to be a very faithful, obedient, and competent leader under Moses (17:10).

17:11 — "When Moses held up his hand... Israel prevailed" - Holding up the hands was associated with fervent prayer (Isa 1:15). God strengthened Israel and caused them to overcome the Amalekites as long as Moses interceded for them. This was an object lesson to all Israel revealing the value of intercessory prayer in the success of any effort.

7:13 — "Amalek and his people" - Amalek had evidently confederated with other peoples and clans in making this attack.

17:14 — Moses was to memorialize this event in a written record especially for Joshua's benefit. As military leader and future theocratic leader, he was to be greatly impressed with God's attitude toward this condemned nation.

"I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek" — The enemies of Israel including Amalek intended to destroy God's people (Ps 83:4), but God has destroyed her enemies in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Their sin against Israel will turn on them (Ps 7:15, 16; 9:15). The LORD intended for Saul to fulfill His will (1 Sam 15:2, 3). The seriousness of Saul's disobedience in that mission was compounded by the fact that he disdained the LORD's oath and thereby dishonored Him. This act was so seriously regarded by the LORD that He rejected Saul from being king. (1 Sam 15:23).

III. Wisdom from Jethro — 18:1-27

18:2 — "Jethro... took Zipporah" — Moses had sent his wife and sons back to Jethro from the lodging place between Midian and Egypt (cf. 4:24-29).

18:3, 4 — In Bible times children's names often bore social or theological implications. The names Moses gave to his sons represented Israel's national life. Gershom, meaning "stranger," reminded them that they were a people without a land although one was promised to them. Eliezer, meaning "God is my help" gave testimony to the LORD's deliverance from Pharaoh and His sufficiency in the present and future.

18:11 — "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods" - Jethro evidently was not monotheistic prior to this time, but the LORD's purpose in Israel's miraculous deliverance was realized by Jethro: "You shall know that I am the LORD."

18:12 — "Jethro ... took a burnt offering" - Literally, he "brought" a burnt offering; and the implication is that he offered the sacrifice himself. This would be legitimate since he was a believer in the one true God and the Aaronic priesthood was not yet officially and exclusively established.

18:13-16 — Jethro observed the work that Moses was doing each day and concluded that it was too much for one man to handle. Moses' task was to "inquire of God" for the people (18:15). He was the consulting oracle to determine God's will in all situations since the people did not have that same free access to God. Furthermore, he was to "make them know the statutes of God and His laws" (18:16). Israel had no written code of laws at this time, but depended on Moses to inquire of the LORD concerning those principles which would determine their actions. Moses communicated these revealed principles to Israel through his decision-making and sought God directly where there was no revealed principle to apply.

18:18 — "you wilt surely wear away, both you and this people" - The word translated "wear away" means literally, "to fade" or "to wither away" like a leaf or plant would wither for lack of moisture. The vital energies of both Moses and the congregation were being taxed by this cumbersome judicial process. The people, having to wait long hours for their cases to be heard, were probably tempted to take matters into their own hands (18:23).

18:19 — "You be for the people to God-ward" - Jethro instructed Moses to continue to mediate between the people and God as their sole embodiment or legislative authority.

18:20 — Moses should also continue to instruct the congregation in those principles which the LORD revealed to him.

18:21 — Moses was encouraged to appoint honorable men to make judgments for him based on those legal principles already revealed by God. The qualifications of these men were four-fold:

1. "Able men" — Literally, men of mighty, active, energetic character (cf. Gen 47:6 - "Men of activity"; 1 Chron. 26:6 and "Mighty men").
2. "Such as fear God" — Men who are deeply impressed with reverence for the God of Israel and recognize their accountability before Him.
3. "Men of truth" — Those whose integrity is not determined by advantage, but by principle.
4. "Hating covetousness" — Men who are not ruled by materialistic ambitions and would therefore abhor bribery (Is 33:15).

18:23 — "If you shall do this thing and God command you so" - There was no vestige of dictatorial spirit in Jethro's suggestion. The incorporation of this plan rested entirely on the willingness of Moses and the superior wisdom of God.

18:24 — "Moses hearkened" - Moses listened to Jethro and God did approve Jethro's suggested plan.

IV. Word from the LORD — 19:1-25

Recent discoveries of ancient Near Eastern texts have shed considerable light on the composition of covenants in Mosaic times. There were two general classifications of treaties: (1) the parity treaty involved mutually binding obligations for two parties of equal importance. (2) Suzerainty treaties were imposed by strong monarchs on their vassals. The form and style followed by this type of covenant is quite parallel to that found in the LORD'S covenant with Israel.

19:4 — "You have seen" - The LORD appealed to the testimony of Israel's personal senses which they would have to deny if they would refute the affirmation God is about to make.

"I bare you on eagles' wings" — This poetic figure aptly illustrates the LORD'S loving faithfulness swooping down to arrest Israel's fall, bearing them up on mighty wings, shaking them off and rescuing them again in His efforts to teach them to soar as they were intended to do.

"And brought you unto Myself" — God's ultimate purpose in all of His deeds thus far was to bring Israel into fellowship with Himself.

19:5, 6 — "If you will obey my voice" - "If" limits the appropriation of the covenant blessings to those who fulfill the conditions. In return for simple obedience, prompted by implicit faith, the LORD would bring Israel into a special three-fold relationship with Himself:

1. "A peculiar treasure... above all people" — The word used here signifies a special treasure, not property in general; it can be anything that is especially valuable to its owner. It is a possession which the owner will not share with someone else, nor would he commit it to the care of someone else. This describes the LORD's election of Israel as a specially chosen people.
2. "A kingdom of priests" — No words could convey a promise of higher honor and more distinguished privileges than this. The implication is that Israel was to fulfill both the functions of king

and priest. Since they were to be a theocracy (God ruled), and not a monarchy, they would each partake of regal status. Their priestly function was as a channel through which all other nations might approach the living and true God.

3. "A holy nation" — They were to be a nation distinguished from all other nations in that they were consecrated unto the LORD's service. This distinctive was to be sealed outwardly by circumcision and holy living by faith.

19:8 — "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do" - This statement constitutes Israel's official ratification of the covenant (cf. 24:3). The confidence of this reply is surprising in light of their past disbelief and future disobedience (32:1ff).

19:10 — "Sanctify them" - Complete cleansing of body and heart was prerequisite to an interview with a holy God of infinite purity.

19:12, 13 — Neither man nor beast would be permitted to touch the mount since it was made sacred by the presence of God. The Israelites should have been impressed with the awful majesty of God. For some, it would have been a temptation to wander up into the mount, yet anything or anyone touching the holy mount would be killed.

19:16-19 — The magnificence of this spectacle is not to be underestimated. God combined manifold effects (thunders, lightnings, thick cloud, trumpet voice, smoke, fire, and earthquake) to signal this most important confrontation with Israel through Moses.

19:21-25 — God instructed Moses to go down and give additional warning to the people, including the priests, that they should not violate the boundaries of the mount. Moses thought this was unnecessary and told God so. Being a far better judge of human nature than Moses, God rejected his plea with the terse rebuke, "Away, go down "(v. 24). Moses should have known better than to counsel the omniscient God of Israel.