

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,
10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 13
THE BOOK OF EXODUS
CHAPTERS 17-18**

INTRODUCTION

As the children of Israel journeyed on towards the place where God wanted them to be, they faced many difficulties and dangers. Like the Israelites, we are also in a spiritual journey through life. Their reactions to these difficulties and dangers are instructive. There were times when their attitudes and actions were not right and they failed. But there were also times when individuals did well and helped the group out of trouble. We learn from their failures as well as their successes. In these two chapters there are some precious lessons in life which we can learn.

OUTLINE

**A. THE TEMPTING OF THE LORD
(17:1-6)**

1. Again, the children of Israel murmured against Moses (17:1-3)
2. Moses turned to the LORD (17:4)

3. The LORD answered and instructed Moses (17:5-6a)
4. Moses struck the Rock in Horeb and water gushed out (17:6b-7)

**B. THE PRAYER OF THE
RIGHTEOUS PREVAILS (17:8-16)**

1. The Amalekites attacked Israel at Rephidim (17:8)
2. Moses and Joshua teamed together (17:9-12)
 - a. Joshua to choose and lead able men to confront the Amalekites (v.9)
 - b. Moses to pray to the LORD on the mountain top with Aaron and Hur (vv.10-12)
3. Joshua defeated the Amalekites (17:13)
4. The LORD instructed Moses to keep a memorial record of the defeat of the Amalekites (17:14)
5. The LORD had kept His promise — Jehovah-nissi (17"15-16)

C. THE FAMILY OF MOSES (18:1-6)

1. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses was a priest in Midian (18:1)
2. Jethro took his daughter, Zipporah and his two sons to meet Moses (18:2-4)
3. Jethro came to the camp at mount Sinai to meet Moses (18:5-6)

D. THE REUNION OF MOSES AND HIS FAMILY (18:7-12)

1. Moses showed filial honour towards his father-in-law (18:7)
2. Moses witnessed the goodness of the LORD (18:8)
3. Jethro rejoiced and praised God (18:9-12)
 - a. Jethro rejoiced for the goodness of the LORD (v.9)
 - b. Jethro blessed the LORD (v.10)
 - c. Jethro acknowledged the sovereignty of God (v.11)
 - d. Jethro worshipped the LORD (v.12)

E. JETHRO ADVISED MOSES ABOUT HIS ADMINISTRATIVE SKILL (18:13-27)

1. Moses alone received and settled the grievances of all the people (18:13)
2. Jethro aptly advised Moses (18:14-23)
 - a. Jethro observed that Moses' method of administering the people was no good (vv.14-17)
 - b. Jethro gave the negative effects (v.18)
 - Moses and the people would be burnt out (v.18a)
 - The work was too great (18b)

- Moses could not do it alone (v.18c)
- c. Jethro gave the positive aspects (vv.19-23):
 - Moses to mediate on behalf of the people before God (19)
 - Teach and show the people the laws of God (20)
 - Choose able, God-fearing, honest, and unselfish leaders to oversee the people in groups (21-22)
 - Moses would be able to endure (23)
 3. Moses humbly accepted and implemented Jethro's suggestion (18:24-27)
 - a. Moses carried out Jethro's counsel (vv.24-25)
 - b. The leaders judged the easier cases (v.26a)
 - c. Moses judged the harder cases (v.26b)
 4. Jethro returned to his own land (18:27)

COMMENTARY

Rephidim

The Israelites journeyed on and now pitched their tents at Rephidim. It was a *resting place* as the name suggested. Ironically, the water of the river had dried up and there was no

water. The people began to contend with Moses and demanded water from him. They accused Moses of bringing them to the desert to kill them and their cattle with thirst. This is an outright challenge to the leadership of Moses. The Israelites had forgotten so quickly what God had done at Marah, and for that matter, what God had done for them in Egypt. At Marah, God made a covenant with them that if they trusted and obeyed Him, He would be their Healer. But alas, they had forgotten what God had said to them. Moses told them that their murmuring was not against him but God — “why chide ye with me? Wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?” (17:2,7). The word “tempt” is a misleading translation for the Hebrew word *nissah* here, which means to test or prove. “Tempt” has the idea of enticing to do wrong or to sin. One cannot tempt God to sin. The same word is used when God tested Abraham’s faith (Genesis 22:1).¹ What Moses was saying to the people is “why are you testing God?” More frequently we test God, expecting God to fulfil His Word — “if this is what you have said, prove it.” We can see their attitude of unbelief and self-gratification, which leads them to murmur against God’s faithful servant Moses. Moses’ reply did not help. They continued in their complaint. It was not wrong to ask for

¹ KJV Genesis 22:1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. God does not “tempt” a person to sin. God tested Abraham’s faith and love.

water. But their complaint was not an innocent request for water. What was wrong with their request for water is their attitude. How on earth could Moses give them water to drink! Moses’ only recourse was to turn to the LORD. How we praise the LORD that He did not show any anger towards the people. The LORD instructed Moses to go before the people and with his rod to strike the rock in Horeb and water would gush out of it (17:5). Moses did so, and there was water for the people.

This is a miraculous act of God. Some people have problem with this event but true Bible-believers have no such problems. They simply trust God’s written word. Is anything too great for your Creator God to do? Surely not. The stupendous miraculous work of God is natural to God. The Apostle Paul comments that the Rock symbolises the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)². While the water refreshed and rejuvenated the children of Israel at Rephidim, Christ is now the Rock of our salvation and sustenance.

Israel’s First Battle

The absence of water at Rephidim was not the only problem

²1 Corinthians 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat; 4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

which have been resolved. Another trouble arose. The Amalekites attacked the children of Israel. When one is being attacked, one must defend oneself. This is the first battle, which the Israelites fought since their departure from Egypt. Moses called Joshua to command a group of chosen men to defend the people against the enemy. This is also the first mention of Joshua, then a young man. The fact that Moses assigned him the task of choosing able men and to lead them to fight against the Amalekites indicates that Joshua must be a man of proven faith with acknowledged intelligence and capabilities. Now what is most instructive in this battle is that Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the mountain top to pray. Moses held up the rod in his hand in a posture of praying to the LORD and as long as his hand was raised up, Joshua prevailed in the battle. But when he lowered his hand because of weakness, the Amalekites would prevail. Interestingly Aaron and Hur brought a stone and placed it under Moses for him to sit; and each of them supported the left and right hands of Moses. In this way, the Israelites won the war, although the Amalekites were not totally defeated (17:14). The battle was won in two ways. There was the physical confrontation with the enemy, and there was the prayerful support of the leaders.

The spiritual lesson here for our learning is unmistakable. In order to have victory in life's struggle against the enemies — sin, Satan, and the world —

it must be won by prayer and action. We must face the enemy up front but we can only be victorious if we unceasingly and earnestly pray to the LORD who is the same *Jehovah-nissi* (Jehovah my Banner). "Nissi" means "be high." Unless the LORD our God is held high and look upon in prayer, we will never have the victory in our battle against the spiritual powers that seek to beset and defeat us. Learn this lesson well. When was the last time we wrestled in prayer and fought against the enemy?

Another interesting note is the mentioning of Moses being told by the LORD to write the event as a memorial in a book for posterity to read and know what the LORD had done for His people (17:14). This is a piece of evidence that Moses wrote the book. As the events occurred, Moses recorded them as inspired by the LORD.

Family Reunion

Separations from loved ones are sad and sometimes painful. Reunions of family members are always happy and wonderful. Moses was reunited with his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought his daughter and the children to meet Moses at Mount Sinai. It is mentioned that Moses had earlier sent his wife and children back to Jethro. There was no mention of this incident previously. The last mention of Moses' wife and children is in Exodus 4:25. Moses must have sent them back after that incident. Jethro's initiative to bring Zipporah and the children to meet

their father Moses at Mount Sinai speaks a lot about him. Presuming that Jethro is much older than Moses, he is a good and kind father-in-law to take the trouble to bring Zipporah and the children to be reunited with their father. One would expect Moses to make the effort and trip to Jethro's house to see his wife and children.

Moses' meeting with his father-in-law is exemplary. When he heard that his father-in-law was on his way to meet him, Moses went out to meet him, and accorded to him the filial honour expected of him. Moses truly is a humble and meek person. While there is no mention of Moses meeting Zipporah and the children, it must not be taken that Moses did not care for them. It is the culture of Orientals not to talk too much about their family. Moses had a good meeting with Jethro and shared what God had done in Egypt for Israel. It is possible that Jethro was not a believer of Yahweh. So Moses shared the greatness and goodness of Yahweh with Jethro. On hearing this, Jethro rejoiced and praised God. Jethro also made a burnt offering and sacrifice to God. This could be the conversion of Jethro that he believed in the God of Israel. They then had a meal together. This is significant. Among ancient Near East, it was the custom to ratify a pact or covenant with fellowship meal. This incident is instructive in our efforts to evangelise others. What do we tell those whom we are praying for their conversion? Like Moses, talk of the great and mighty work that the Lord

Jesus Christ has done in our lives and the lives of others. No one can fault such testimony. Instead, they might even praise God and be open to accept the Gospel and receive Christ Jesus into their lives.

One Man Show

The work of God is not a one-man show. Jethro's meeting with Moses is providential. Jethro observed that Moses alone had been doing everything. The people lined up from morning till evening to see Moses who would settle their disputes and give the counsel of the LORD. Jethro commented that what Moses was doing was not good. The way Moses was doing would certainly wear or burn him out, and also weary the people. The work was too great and much for him to perform alone (18:18). Jethro had a better suggestion. Moses should tend to the people by giving them the counsel of God, and only important matters be referred to him. All other matters would be delegated to other leaders of different levels of administrative skills and abilities. These administrators must also be men who fear God; men who are honest; and men who are not covetous. These four qualities basic for all leaders — men who are capable, God-fearing, honest, and not covetous. The wonderful thing about Moses here is that he humbly accepted and implemented Jethro's plan. Jethro had told him that if God so commanded him, adopt the method he had suggested. Members of a church must choose their leaders with such qualities and expect them to

demonstrate the same in their discharge of their responsibilities and duties.

The work of God is not a one-man show. It is teamwork. It is humanly impossible for any one person to be effective and at the same time efficient in performing all the work of the church. The Apostle Paul describes the church as the Body of Christ who is the Head; and all the other parts of the body are members of the church. Although they may be diverse in their abilities, they function as one unified body. Each member discharges his own responsibility and duty for the benefit and welfare of the whole body. There is always the danger for one man to try to do everything by himself. He will be stretched thin and becomes ineffective and feelings of weariness and frustration will set in. Another thing we do learn is that organised administration in a church is not unbiblical. It is unscriptural for a church to adopt an administration in which everyone does what is right in his own eyes as the Spirit leads. Pious words that means nothing. The work of the church of Christ must be done decently and in order. Let each member of the Body of Christ discover his own natural and spiritual gifts and use them for the growth and development of the church.

The LORD our God is teaching us many precious truths and lessons. We must diligently and willingly submit to His teachings and not lean to our own understanding and wisdom. God knows best and His work must be done in His

way, in fact, every work of man if done in His way will be successful. As we aspire to walk uprightly before the LORD, let us not be unbelieving and test the LORD. In overcoming the enemy, let us face it courageously and honestly with much prayer to the LORD for victory is ours if we do so. Let us seize opportunities before us to glorify the life transforming work of God to the end that others might be converted to trust and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. As members, who possess diverse gifts, let us work together as one body in Christ for the advancement and fulfilment of His kingdom.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Exodus 17:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11; 1 Samuel 12:14-15

TUESDAY: Exodus 17:8-16; Matthew 18:19-20; James 5:13-18

WEDNESDAY: Exodus 18:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:13-15; Acts 4:19-21

THURSDAY: Exodus 18:7-12; Ephesians 6:1-3; 1 Timothy 5:1-2

FRIDAY: Exodus 18:13-27; Proverbs 11:14; Proverbs 12:15; Hebrews 5:12-14

Discussion Questions

1. What was wrong in the asking for water by the Israelites?

2. What is meant by “ye tempt the Lord”?

3. What qualities in Joshua can we correctly infer by the selection of Joshua by Moses?

4. In Exodus 17:14, why did the LORD tell Moses to “rehearse it in the ears of Joshua”?

5. What important truth do we learn in Exodus 17:10-14?

6. What can you say about Jethro in bringing about the family reunion?

7. How do you anticipate family reunion?

8. What did Moses tell his father in law first when he met him?

9. What was Jethro's response? What can we learn about drawing our family closer to God?

10. What did Jethro observed about Moses that perturbed him?

11. How did Moses respond to Jethro's counsel?

12. In what way would it be difficult for Moses to respond to Jethro's advice? What qualities of character did Moses possess in order to accept Jethro's advice?
