

Parashah 17

Yitro

יתרו

“Jethro”

Exodus 18:1 – 20:26

Torah Together



This key *Torah* portion describes the giving of the Ten Commandments to the Israelites. The experience was very dramatic and showed the awesome majesty of our God. Much insight can be gained into the character of God and His expectations of us by studying this story.

1. Jethro visits Moses - 18:1-27

a) Here we learn that Moses had sent his wife, Zipporah, and their sons back to her father, Jethro. When and why do you think this was done? What significance do you find in the names of Moses' sons?

b) What do you find interesting about the initial meeting between Moses and Jethro? What was Jethro's conclusion after Moses told him all that had happened to them? What did Jethro do with “Moses, Aaron and the elders of Israel”?

Scripture Link:

Exodus 4:20 clearly states that Moses took his wife and sons with him as he began his trip to Egypt. However, **Exodus 18:2** implies that Moses had sent his wife and sons back home to her father. Do you think the incident described in **Exodus 4:24-26** may have had something to do with this?

Life in a Polytheistic Society

As we read the stories in the *Torah*, it is important to remember that people in this time and culture believed in many gods. The God of the Israelites needed to show Himself to be not just another God, but THE God of the Universe. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, believed in YHWH, but he also believed in many other gods. So his statement in **Exodus 18:11** is important because it shows he then understood who really is God.

Results of Delegation

Even though Moses was used greatly by God, he was still just a man and could only accomplish so much in a day. By delegating some of his work, he was able to focus on his time with God and on teaching the people about God. Perhaps more importantly, God was better able to work in the lives of other Israelites to develop their talents.

Scripture Link:

Given his new understanding of the God of the Israelites, one may have thought that Jethro would have joined the Israelites on their journeys. It appears that this was not the case. **Numbers 10:29-32** may shed additional light on this subject.

God Marries Israel

There are many similarities between the standard marriage contract and the contract God establishes with Israel. God promises to love and cherish (“you will be my treasured possession”) and Israel promises to obey. Note that in **Exodus 19:8**, Israel said, “I do.”

c) After Jethro had seen how Moses spent his time with the people, what was his concern? What was the essence of Jethro’s advice to Moses? According to verses 19 & 20, on what two tasks did Jethro tell Moses to focus? Do you think this was godly advice?

d) Did Moses follow the advice of his father-in-law? What four qualifications did Moses look for in the men that he appointed as leaders? Compare I Tim 3:1-13 & Titus 1:5-9.

e) What did Jethro do after this? Do you find this interesting?

2. At Mount Sinai - 19:1-25

a) How long had it taken for the Israelites to reach Mount Sinai? Do you know in what month this occurred on the Hebrew calendar? What feast is celebrated in this month?

“You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”

Exodus 19:6

b) Analyze God’s proposed contract with Israel in verses 3 - 6. What two things does God promise Israel? What conditions must Israel meet? Does this remind you of another common type of contract? List any similarities and differences. How did the Israelites respond to God’s proposal?

c) After the Israelites accepted God's proposal, He wanted to meet with them. What did the people have to do to prepare for their meeting with God? Why do you think this was necessary? Why do you think God set limits around the mountain?

d) Describe the events on the day that the people went out to meet with God. What did the people hear as God spoke to Moses?

e) Skipping ahead to Exodus 20:18-21, how did the people respond when they heard God speaking to Moses? Do you think the people needed to be warned not to cross through the boundary that had been placed at the bottom of the mountain?

3. The Ten Commandments - 20:1-21

a) The first commandment, which many consider the most important, is given as a negative commandment ("thou shalt not..."). What is the positive form of this commandment?

b) The second commandment is also given in the negative sense. Why do you think God is so concerned about idols and images (see **Isaiah 40:18-26**)? Do you find any significance in the fact that this commandment lists the punishment if it is broken? What is the positive form of this commandment?

God's Holiness

The holiness of God can be deadly to sinful humans. We will read many stories where improper interaction between an unclean person and a holy God results in illness or death. A large part of the training that the Israelites needed was to learn how to approach a holy God.

God's Awesomeness

The lightning and thunder, the fire and the deafening trumpet blast (the voice of God) must have been frightening for the people. We see from **Exodus 20:18-21** that the people were so fearful that they asked Moses to interact with God for them. They were afraid that God's voice itself would kill them.

A Jealous God

God describes himself as jealous, meaning "apprehensive of losing affection or position." It is as if God were worried that "some one else" might take his place in our life. This seems to fit the situation well! God wants us to hold Him in the absolute highest regard in our lives, not to be replaced with any other gods, idols, or images. Is there anything in your life that you love more than God?

The Sabbath

The Sabbath is very important to God. There are many commands and references to it throughout all of scripture. Here God makes it clear that we are to “keep the Sabbath holy,” (set it aside for God) and to “not do any work . . .” As with all commands in the *Torah*, we are blessed if we keep them. (See **Isaiah 58:13-14** to see another promise God makes to those who keep the Sabbath.)

Commandment Order

It has been observed that the Ten Commandments can be easily divided into two parts: The first five Commandments concern our relationship with God while the second five concern our relationship with each other. Does this make sense to you? Does the fifth commandment fit this pattern?

Idolatry and Adultery

Given that God likens our commitment to Him to that of a marriage contract, the act of adultery (being unfaithful to one’s spouse) is like idolatry (being unfaithful God). We know that God can always be trusted to be faithful and true in His commitment to us. He wants us to be faithful to our spouse in the same way.

c) The third commandment concerns the misuse of God’s name. Can you give some examples of the misuse of God’s name? What might be a positive form of this commandment?

d) The fourth commandment establishes Shabbat (the Sabbath). Is there any question about which day is Shabbat? How are we to remember it? How do you think Shabbat should be observed today?

e) The fifth commandment, the only one with a promise (**Ephesians 6:2**), is a positive commandment (“Thou shalt....”). Why do you think this is important to God?

f) Commandments six through ten deal with our relationships with one another. In the sixth commandment, the Hebrew word *rasah* is more appropriately translated “murder” than “kill.” What is the difference between murdering and killing? What might be a positive form of this commandment?

g) The seventh commandment addresses sexual immorality and the sanctity of marriage. What might be a positive form of this commandment? What parallels can you find between this commandment and the second commandment?

h) While the eighth commandment most directly applies to personal property, in what other ways do we “steal”? What is a positive form of this commandment? Can you see how this commandment might be similar to the third commandment?

i) The ninth commandment involves lying. In what other ways do we “bear false witness”? A positive form of this commandment might involve the “truth”, about which the Bible has lots to say. Do you gain insight from any particular verse or passage?

j) The tenth commandment addresses our attitudes more than our actions. What does this imply to you about sin in general? How would you state this command positively?

4. Idols and Altars - 20:22-26

a) What material was to be used in constructing an altar to God? Why do you think He was concerned with the types of stones that were used? Why do you think God prohibited steps at His altar?

b) What was to be done on God’s altar? Where was this to be done and what was God’s commitment to the people?

Scripture Link:

In **Matthew 19:16-18**, *Yeshua* gives a shortened list of the commandments, ending the list with “love your neighbor as yourself.” Do you think this captures the intent of the tenth commandment?

Altars and Sacrifices

The animal sacrifice was at the heart of God’s system of worship. Today, it seems foreign and somewhat primitive to us. But it taught several valuable lessons. First, God’s perfect justice demands payment for sin and that usually involves death. However, in love, God allows us to substitute something innocent to pay for our sin. Also, a free-will offering of something of value to us allows us to demonstrate our thankfulness to God. All of these reasons still apply today.

Digging deeper

1. Compare Jethro's advice to Moses in **Exodus 18** with the incident recorded in **Acts 6:1-6**. List the similarities and differences. What lessons in leadership can you draw from this?

2. *Yeshua* had many things to say about the Ten Commandments. (e.g., **Matthew 5:21-30; 12:1-12; 15:1-11; 19:16-30; 22:34-40; Mark 7:5-13; 12:28-34; Luke 6:1-10; 10:25-37; 13:10-17**; and many others) After having examined the origin of these commandments, do *Yeshua's* comments take on any additional significance for you?

For further study, see

Haftarah : Isaiah 6:1 – 7:6; 9:5-7

Brit Hadashah : Matthew 5:21-30; 15:1-11; 19:16-30; Mark 7:5-15;
10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30; Acts 6:1-7; Romans 2:17-29;
7:7-12; 13:8-10; Ephesians 6:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:1-14;
2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 12:18-29;
James 2:8-13; 1 Peter 2:9-10