

Exodus 16 – 24

Exodus 16:1-18

Exodus 16 marks the start of the journey from Egypt to Canaan. It takes these people through the desert (2) or better 'wilderness'. The wilderness in the Bible is always a place of testing, but also provision.

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The test is not inconsiderable. 600,000 people travelling through the desert with no obvious means of support. They grumble because they have lost sight of the God who rescued them and they have forgotten what they sang on the shore of the Red Sea. (15:11-13).

Moses is at pains to emphasise that their grumbling is not against him but the Lord. He hears their grumbling – in other words this is not a trivial detail but a serious offence.

Yet the Lord provides for these ungrateful people. Quail and manna are supplied – *as much as they need* (16)

- Our lives will experience testing. Will it induce grumbling or patient trust? See Paul's example. (Phil 4:11-13)
- In which direction are we looking; back to where we have come from (3) or towards the future promised by God?
- The God who saves is the God who provides. Are we counting on his provision?

Exodus 16:19-36

Lessons from the manna.

The one who gathered much did not have too much and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed. (18)

It taught God's concern for equality. Paul applies this lesson in 2 Cor 8 where he urges the Gentile churches to support their Judean brothers practically because they have benefitted spiritually from these Jewish believers.

They were not to keep any until the next day. *Some of them paid no attention to Moses* (20) The retained manna quickly turned bad and stank. The manna wasn't a commodity that could be exploited as they pleased. It came with instructions and these needed to be followed. God is preparing them to receive his law at Sinai. (28 & Deut 8:3)

They were to gather twice as much on Friday, and not to expect to find any on the Sabbath.

It served to set the seventh day apart. The life of the nation was not dependent on the manna but on God. This principle would be enshrined in the fourth commandment. By setting the Lord's day apart from all the others we are declaring that it's not work that sustains us but our God.

- Is equality an issue that concerns us?
- Are God's instructions for living the Christian life clear in our minds. Are they non negotiable
- Is the Lord's day a priority? Am I sustained by work or God?

Exodus 17:1-16

The wilderness is a place of testing and the testing is very challenging.

Chapter 16: can he supply daily bread?

Chapter 17:1-7 can he supply fresh water? And the second half, can he protect his people from their enemies. (see Deut 25:17,18 for a description of these events)

Once again the people take issue with Moses. But Moses is not the enemy. In the second half of the chapter Amalek attacks Israel but its not even merely the Amalekites. (16) *Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the Lord.* This is a spiritual conflict. The target is God. The aggressor is Satan and Amalek in this case is his proxy.

In the second half of the chapter Joshua leads an army who engage with the Amalekites. But the decisive battle is not fought on the plain. Matters are settle up the hill where Moses interceded for his people. (11-13)

- Are we clear about the issues? Are we tempted to regard certain people as the enemy or can we see the bigger picture?
- The crux of the matter is Gods promises. Am I clear about what he has promised and can he be relied upon to deliver on these come what may?
- Have we learned how to fight? Moses share in these events was not symbolic. He remained up the hill until sunset because lives depended on him. Can our prayers be counted on?

Exodus 18:1-27

Moses regularly finds himself the target of people's complaint. Here he meets with encouragement and wise counsel. This help comes not from an Israelite but his 'foreign' father in law. (Jethro the priest of Midian) Jethro arrives with Moses wife and sons and the picture is one of harmony and peace. And instead of place names that recall failure (17:7) the meaning of Moses children's names are included inviting trust. (3,4)

Jethro proves something of a rebuke to Israel. Unlike the nation he was not present at the Red Sea nor did he see the defeat of the Egyptian army. Yet *'Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians'* (9)

Moses defers to his father in laws advice to delegate some of his responsibility. The previous chapters demonstrate the weight of responsibility Moses carries. Numbers 11 (see 11,14,17) records his struggle with all this. Jethro speaks sound, down to earth wisdom into the situation. "Moses you need to delegate". His son in law defers to his father in laws advice.

- Are we tempted to take upon ourselves greater responsibility than God expects. Could we delegate some of our tasks?
- Who do we most resemble. The foreigner delighted to hear what the Lord had done for his people or those who can only see the problems.
- Who needs encouragement in our families

Exodus 19:1-25

The rest of the book of Exodus takes place at Mount Sinai. Exodus contains 2 bookends. The first when Moses meets God at the burning bush (chap 3) and the second when the nation assembles at the foot of the burning mountain. Both involve distance and separation because of the character of God. Moses is instructed not to come any closer and Israel here is not to venture onto the mountain. (12) We are reminded of the vast gulf that separates a holy God from sinful people.

But we are also reminded of Gods covenant (5) the plan that begins with Abraham and which finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ where this holy God makes us his very own people. We are not though allowed to forget Gods holiness. (Heb 12:18-29 especially v29)

After all that has gone before (from the second half of chapter 15 – 17) the language God uses is surprising. He intends to make Israel 'his treasured possession'. The term describes a monarch's personal treasures as opposed to his more general wealth. They are to be for him 'a kingdom of priests and holy nation'. The terms are parallel and emphasis the need for Israel to be distinct from the other nations. This distinctiveness will be effected by their obedience to the commandments.

- Consider what Peter has to say about being 'holy' 1 Peter 1:13-16
- Reflect on the privileges that are ours as these terms are applied to the Church in the New Testament. (1 Peter 2:9,10)

Exodus 20:1-12.

The Law (or the commandments) works in a number of ways. It makes us aware of our sin. (Romans 3:20) It restrains sin by means of its threats and consequences (1 Tim 1:8-11) But it also sets out the kind of life God expects his redeemed people to live. Here in Exodus 20 we are reminded that it is given to rescued people. Here the life of holiness is defined. (19:6)

God claims exclusive worship. In a world of multiple 'gods', the perfect jealousy of their covenant making God requires them to guard their affections. He is the God of the word, revealing himself by what he says and does. They are forbidden from image making.

Taking Gods name in vain refers primarily to someone making a deceptive oath or using Gods name to sanction a dishonest act.

The Sabbath rest (one day in seven) indicates to the nations that Israel's security relies not in the profitability of work but the sustenance of their God. Work is made to take second place to their relationship to God. It is reflection of Gods pattern of working in creation. The New Testament moves the timing from the 7th to the 1st day of the week. It remains a commandment.

Family life and respect for parents is given a high profile by God.

- John Calvin called the human heart an idol factory. What threatens to capture our affections?
- Do you negotiate over how you spend Sunday – would you describe it as the Lord's Day?
- Could we be described as people who 'honour' our parents?

Exodus 20: 13-26

The second part of the law expresses how we are to love our neighbour. We respect our neighbours life, marriage and property.

The first three (v13,14 & 15) concern what we do. The next (v16) what we say and the final commandment (17) what we think.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches us how Gods law is to be followed by the Christian. He raises the bar and challenges to deal with what is going on in our hearts: anger (Matt 5:21-26) lust (Matt 5:27-30) and truth (Matt 5: 33-37)

All of this reminds us of the need for the help of the Holy Spirit who comes to write God's law on our hearts. (Jer 31:33, Ezek 36:26,27). It is for this reason that the law can be read as much as promise : "You **shall** not murder" as prohibition.

Thank God that he shows us how to love our neighbour.

Look for an opportunity to do just that.

Seek the help of the Holy Spirit.

Exodus 21: 1-11.

Exodus 20 is described as 'words' (the ten words) and spoken by God to all Israel. Exodus 21-23 are called ordinances and are delivered through Moses.

Significantly they begin by addressing the issue of slavery. Israel had been slaves in Egypt and this experience is to shape the way they treat the vulnerable within their society. (Lev 25, Deut 15)

Hebrew slaves were to be freed in the 7th year thereby preventing excessive exploitation and providing opportunity for a fresh start. The inference behind the situation described in v5-7 implies the life of a Hebrew slave ought to be worthwhile even desirable. Protection is also afforded female slaves. Whilst these provisions look ahead to Israel's arrival in the Promised Land they recognise that life will continue to contain setbacks and difficulties. The law is there to minimise the damage.

- Will we remember what we once were and will we allow it to shape our behaviour towards others especially those who are most vulnerable. (Eph 2:11-13)
- Can we view 'law' positively, there to protect and safeguard life? Will we pray for those who make our laws?
- Are we caused to wonder that Jesus Christ who is 'in very nature God made himself nothing taking the very nature of a slave' (Phil 2:5-11)

Exodus 23: 1-33

The first 13 verses take aspects of the commandments and apply them specifically to every day life. Here is further teaching on how to love your neighbour: don't show favouritism, don't exploit the misfortune of your enemy, don't deny justice to the poor.

Farm your land in a way that takes consideration of the poor. Organise your week so as to show consideration to your animals and your slaves.

Allow your lives and your activity to be punctuated by these festivals that remind you of your dependence on the Lords rescue and provision. (14-19)

Note: v19 Do not cook a kid in its mothers milk. This is linked to Canaanite 'magic' and reckoned by some to be to do with fertility magic.

V20-32 provide assurance to Israel as they set out from Mt Sinai to make the journey to Canaan. The emphasis falls on Gods activity (he will drive out their enemies) and their listening and obeying his word (Pay attention to him and listen to what he says)

- Reflect on the various ways we are encouraged to 'love our neighbour'. Select one and keep it in mind over this week.
- Three annual festivals become one special meal. The Lord's Supper is our reminder of our dependence – how important it is in our scheme of things
- Are we connecting listening and obeying to progress and arrival?

Exodus 24: 1-18

Although Israel are travelling to the Promised Land these events indicate that the destination is not simply a geographical location. Mount Sinai may look like a detour but it is in fact central to the whole enterprise as these verses indicate.

Alex Motyer makes the following points:

The altar with its 12 pillars (24:4) represents the situation achieved by the Exodus. The Lord has brought his people – the 12 tribes – to himself and they are now permanently secure in his presence as if set in stone.

The blood of the sacrificed beasts is divided into two. As at the Passover (Exod 12:13) its first impact is on God, as its sprinkled on the altar. (24:6) (Propitiation and reconciliation)

The law of God is read and the people respond by committing themselves to obey. (24:7)

The remaining blood is sprinkled on the people (24:8) This means their sins continue to be forgiven as they seek to live obediently.

In 9-11 a covenant meal takes place in which the leaders and seventy representative elders eat and drink in God's presence. The goal to which the Bible looks is fellowship with God. This meal on the mountain recurs in Isa 25:6-8 and culminates in the marriage supper of the Lamb. (Rev 19:7-9)

- Appreciate how these events help us to understand what the death of Jesus accomplishes. His death both turns away his Father's wrath from our lives and provides ongoing forgiveness as we seek to live obediently (1 John 1:7)
- It emphasises our need to be listening and obeying God's word
- It challenges us to keep fellowship with God at the centre of our lives.