

Lessons from Torah 66 – Exodus 17:8-18:27

Building A Community

1. God teaches Israel through the threats they encounter:
 - a. In Exodus 15:22-17:7 we looked at two threats to the Israelites in the Exodus – Thirst and Hunger
 - i. These threats were met by God alone
 - ii. The lesson was – trust in me, for I am with you
 - b. In today's lesson, Israel faces two more threats
 - i. Exodus 17:8-16 unprovoked attack by Amalek
 - ii. Exodus 18 – Moses is wearing himself out
2. The response to the two threats in today's lesson comes from the community itself
 - a. Exodus 17:8-16 – Battle against the Amalekites
 - i. Joshua led the army
 - ii. The army did the fighting
 - iii. Aaron and Hur supported Moses
 - iv. God gave the victory
 - b. Exodus 18 – Burden of leadership
 - i. Jethro saw Moses' burden and suggested a way to relieve it by sharing the burden of leadership
 - ii. Moses "listened" to Jethro instead of clinging to his authority as leader
 - iii. The people established a system of judges
 - iv. God gave his blessing and approved (verse 23)
3. What is the lesson here - why doesn't God simply miraculously intervene, as he did before?
 - a. God freed Israel to make them a nation
 - b. The Israelites did not see itself as a nation
 - i. The 'tribe' (descended from Jacob) was more important than the nation
 - ii. The 'clan' mattered more than the tribe
 - iii. The 'family' mattered more than the clan
 - c. In order to be a nation they needed to see themselves as a part of something bigger, and that each contributed to the success or failure of the whole (see Joshua 22:20)
4. Christians have a similar problem:
 - a. We often think only in terms of a "personal" relationship with Jesus, not as a community of believers
 - b. 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10 – we are a "race", a "nation"
5. God had two lessons to teach Israel - and the Church
 - a. Exodus 15:23-17:7 – "God is with us"
 - b. Exodus 17:8-18:27 "We each contribute to the success or failure of the nation"
 - c. Throughout the Exodus, God would re-enforce this lesson that the community as a whole is blessed by each person's obedience and cursed by each individual's disobedience
 - d. Even with the "Ten Words" (Commandments) coming in Chapter 20, one tablet concerns our responsibility toward God while the other concerns our responsibility toward each other
6. Community is destroyed as each individual lives only for self, with self as the final authority (we learned this when we studied 1 Corinthians, and we will see it lived out again as we work our way through the Exodus), so we end up:
 - a. Fighting each other
 - b. Tearing down our leaders
 - c. Criticizing each other
 - d. Withholding our talents and expect to be served
7. Community is built as we work toward a common cause
 - a. We meet as we can, and pray always for each other
 - b. Fighting together against a common enemy
 - c. Supporting the leaders
 - d. Advise each other
 - e. Contribute our talents by serving others
 - f. This is why the current government restrictions so hard
 - i. Not only are we to "practice" social "distancing" - which ignores our need for interpersonal contact
 - ii. But also we are supposed to think we are 'contributing to the effort' by doing nothing
 - iii. These both go contrary to our very nature as beings created in the image of God for whom being isolated was declared "not good" from the very beginning (Genesis 2:18)
 - g. Ultimately, it is God's Spirit – and our common faith – that make us 'one body'

As we try to minimize the threat of CoViD19, let us remember – "What will it profit you to gain the world but still lose your soul?" – Luke 19:43