

#17 Yitro – Exodus 18:1 to 20:26 (23)

By Moshe Schwab

While Praying:

- * There is a standard way to understand how God is at work in our lives.
- * It is not just a calling or a just a thrilling experience.
- * Be connected to the power of God. It is the best way to live.
- * Don't be trapped by only what you can see, to what is worldly.
- * Be faithful in God's ways. That is the best way to live.

Yitro means, "Jethro." This portion begins by saying that Yitro, the father in law of Moshe (Moses), heard about what God had done and He brings Moshe's sons and wife to him. Yitro confesses that the God of Israel is over all. He becomes a believer. Moshe, the leaders of Israel, and Yitro make a sacrifice to God and eat together. Yitro sees Moshe administering all of the judgments and he tells Moshe that he needs to set up a justice system and hear only the difficult cases. Moshe listened to Yitro and then Yitro goes back home.

Moshe then goes up to the mountain and God calls to him and tells him what he is to say to Israel. If they keep His commandments, they will be a kingdom of priests for God. "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation;" Exodus 19:5-6 NKJV. Moshe tells the people and the people agree to obey God.

God tells Moshe that He, God, will speak to him and the people. The people were not to touch the mountain until the shofar sounds and they were to prepare for their meeting by washing their clothes. On the third day Moshe brought the people to the mountain and there was thunder and lighting, a thick smoke, and a shofar kept blasting louder and louder. God called Moshe up the mountain and God also told Moshe to tell the people that no one was to go up the mountain after Moshe and Aharon. Then God, Yehováh, gives the people the ten words (Ten Commandments) in Exodus 20:3-17 NKJV:

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image — any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. 7 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. 8 " Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. 12 " Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you. 13 "You shall not murder. 14 "You shall not commit adultery. 15 "You shall not steal. 16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 "You shall not covet your neighbor 's house; you shall not covet your neighbor' s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor 's."

The people experienced all that was going on and they were afraid so they asked Moshe to speak to God for them. Moshe approaches the thick darkness while the people stood back. God tells Moshe that the people are not to make any idols and that they are to make an altar of earth or of uncut stone and not build steps up to the altar so no one will be indecent. They are to make their offerings at the place where God chooses.

This portion begins with Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, coming to see Moshe. He was a gentile priest of Midian where they practiced idolatry and some despicable practices associated with idolatry. Yitro believes in the God of Israel and is fully accepted among the Israeli leadership. We should remember that it was always God's intention that the nations should believe in the true God through Israel. Israel was unable to accomplish that until the coming of the Jewish Messiah Yeshua who has spread the message of the true God around the world.

In this portion, God promises that He will make Israel a holy nation and the people respond that they will do what God tells them to do. We could liken the account to a marriage ceremony between God and Israel where God enters into a relationship with them as their husband (see Isaiah 54:5). Mount Sinai acted as the chuppah (canopy) and the Ten Commands as the ketuvah (marriage contract). The Jewish writings say that it had rained so that the dessert was in bloom and Israel was surrounded by flowers. The giving of the Ten Commandments occurred on Shavuot and the giving of the Holy Spirit also occurred on Shavuot.

There is thunder and lightning, a thick smoke, and a shofar that kept getting louder and louder. Perhaps Yeshua was blowing the shofar. The people were afraid and so God allows Moshe to speak for the people. Moshe becomes an advocate who speaks on behalf of the people just like the Messiah Yeshua is our advocate that speaks on our behalf (1 John 2:10). Although the Ten Commandments are important, it should be remembered there are other commandments that are also important that we should keep.

The Haftarah for Yitro is Isaiah 6:1 to 7:6, 9:5-6. Isaiah had just written a prophetic song about Israel's demise. This portion begins with Ye-ho-VAH Tsava'ot (the "Lord of Hosts" which is implying warfare) sitting on His throne with seraphs worshipping God and saying, "holy, holy, holy," that is "kadosh, kadosh, kadosh." It says that the door posts shook and the House (referring to the heavenly Temple) kept filling with smoke. The heavenly vision reminds us of Israel's encounter with God at Mt. Sinai. In this portion, God is sitting which is an attribute of a man and so Isaiah probably sees God in the shape of a man just like Ezekiel did in one of his visions. Isaiah is sent to Israel even though they will not hear Isaiah and will not repent. Isaiah is told by God to say to Ahaz to not be afraid; the invaders this time will not succeed against Judah.

Also, Isaiah 9:5-6 is part of this portion which prophetically talks about the coming of God as King. **The attributes in these scriptures can only be attributed to God.** Israel's mission was to bring the true God to the entire world. That has been accomplished in part through God coming as a man in the person of the Jewish Messiah Yeshua. Someday Yeshua will return and complete His mission, and establish peace and His kingdom forever. In the present, Yeshua gives those who believe in Him personal peace through the Holy Spirit. All the millions of those who have the Holy Spirit can have the peace Yeshua gives.

Isaiah 9:5-6 CJB

"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; dominion will rest on his shoulders, and he will be given the name Pele-Yo'etz El Gibbor Avi-'Ad Sar-Shalom [Wonder of a Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace], in order to extend the dominion and perpetuate the peace of the throne and kingdom of David, to secure it and sustain it through justice and righteousness henceforth and forever. The zeal of ADONAI-Tzva'ot (Yehovah of Hosts) will accomplish this."

Our ancestors experienced the awesome power of God at Mount Sinai so that they trembled. Through our Messiah Yeshua we have been made part of a heavenly community and we need to take that seriously. Hebrews 12:22-25 CJB says:

"You have come to Mount Tziyon, that is, the city of the living God, heavenly Yerushalayim; to myriads of angels in festive assembly; to a community of the firstborn whose names have been recorded in heaven; to a Judge who is God of everyone; to spirits of righteous people who have been brought to the goal; to the mediator of a new covenant, Yeshua; and to the sprinkled blood that speaks better things than that of Hevel (Abel). See that you don't reject the One speaking! For if those did not escape who rejected him when he gave divine warning on earth, think how much less we will escape if we turn away from him when he warns from heaven."

There is a standard way to understand how God is at work in our lives in these Messianic times. It should be understood that the very first thing we need to do as believers is to do what God tells us. In this portion, God gives Israel the 10 Commandments, but that is not all the commandments that God gives us. We are to keep all of God's commands. Remember, Yeshua is God so He gave us the commandments in both in the Old Testament and the New Testament portions of the Bible. Yeshua said, "If you love me, you will keep my commands;" John 14:15 NKJV.

Kefa (Peter) addresses the problem with those who think it is okay to dismiss God's commandments. He says in 2 Peter 2:4-5 NKJV:

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly."

I often say that Noah was righteous and did what was right and saved himself and the world. Those who sinned were destroyed.

So, don't be fooled by those who say it is okay to sin. God didn't spare the angels Kefa says. The Bible says the devils believe in God and they are destined for the lake of fire. James 2:19 NKJV says, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!"

In this portion, we see how powerful and amazing God is. We need to remember how important it is to follow God's commandments. We are to follow God's commandments, but we are to also listen to the Holy Spirit in this Messianic age. Just as Israel experienced God every day in the desert, we can experience God through the Holy Spirit.

How do we experience the Holy Spirit?

- * Often the Holy Spirit will remind us to do what is right. The Holy Spirit is our helper (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit does not tell us to sin or do what is wrong.
- * The Holy Spirit can work in our minds to be kind, caring, patient. Shaul (Paul) talks about the fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23.
- * The Holy Spirit may lead us to do something at times during the day.
- * The Holy Spirit may call us for a specific purpose like serving the poor or other acts of service.
- * The Holy Spirit gives us gifts. These are supernatural gifts. For example, a person who gives a prophetic word speaks words from God and not simply their own thoughts. It is wrong to say we speak from God when we are simply telling others what we have been thinking about. God can give believers many spiritual gifts. In the Old Testament, God even gave gifting for building and making the Tent of Meeting in the desert. There are lists of gifts in Romans 12:4-8, Ephesians 4:11-13, and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. Jewish lists are short lists rather than listing everything. For example, Shaul (Paul) does not list all possible sins every time he talks about sins.
- * We can experience the peace of the Holy Spirit and God can work in many other ways. We may even feel a peace that seems to make 30 minutes like 5 minutes.

Our spiritual life is **not** just a calling by God for us to do something or a just a thrilling experience. There have been some movements where people go to church just to experience God. It's true that we can experience God, but that is not all that God wants us to do. This one person I know who was part of a prophetic movement at one time told me that everyone just went to church just to hear prophetic words or be thrilled by the presence of God. In 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40 NKJV says, "How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." ... "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Our meetings need to be conducted so we are built up spiritually. So, we also need good biblical exposition and order in our weekly meetings. Shaul told us to have orderly meetings and those who think they know better are wrong (1 Corinthians 14:40). If you want to experience the peace of God, you can do that at any time, and not just when we get together. Some think their meetings need to be long and drawn out with a lot of singing.

I am not against experiencing the Holy Spirit. I will sit and pray at times and just welcome God's peace while at home. It is very uplifting! When we get together, it is not just to experience God's presence. Our spiritual life is about living out our lives every day with God and we need biblical encouragement for this and to grow up spiritually. We can have other types of meetings for extended prayer or for an extended time to sing and experience God's presence. I think that is a great idea and I participate in those types of meetings as well.

Being connected to the power of God through the Holy Spirit is the best way to live. Like I said, the Holy Spirit helps us to do what is right, gives us fruit of the Holy Spirit, can give us special callings, and can give us spiritual gifts. When I say we are to keep order in our meetings, I am not saying we are not to allow the work of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. The Holy Spirit was intended for our daily use and not just at congregation. The disconnect between our spiritual life and putting our 1 hour in a week bothered me years ago. I thought there has got to be something better than this. We are to be connected to God every day and not just for 1 hour a week!

Don't be trapped by only what you can see; don't be trapped by living a worldly life. Just putting in your 1 hour a week is a worldly life. God never intended for His Messianic people to be holy for 1 hour a week and then live like hell. Doing that makes no sense at all. It says in 1 John 2:15-17 NKJV, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

It is not a bad idea to think that worldly things are going to pass away. So, don't let anything come between you and God. I remember when Yugoslavia was a single nation and then war broke out between various factions and many lost their lives and all they had and the country became divided and still is divided today. We can get fooled into thinking that this is all there is, but that is not true. The opposite is true. This is a time of testing and when we believe in the Messiah Yeshua and live how God wants us to live, our future life with God will not pass away.

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1 NKJV:

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen,

but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Be faithful in God's ways. That is the best way to live. What an amazing God we have. He has told us how to live; He is a loving God who cares about us. He gave us the Holy Spirit in this Messianic age to help us live right. God continues to reach down to mankind through the ages to help us. Sometimes we think of God calling us to do something or an experience of God as important spiritual moments, but that is not all of life with God is about. Keep God's commandments, but also be connected to God's power through the Holy Spirit every day. Don't be trapped into thinking that this life is all there is. This world is passing away. Believers can look forward to a wonderful eternal life someday. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;" Hebrews 10:23 NKJV.¹

¹ The context of this verse includes: "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, " Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God;" Hebrews 10:29-31 NKJV.