

Exodus: Life in the Wilderness

Synergy

Series Overview

After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, they began a 40 year trek in the wilderness. They were free of Egypt, but not yet to the land God had promised them. In the final chapters of Exodus, we see God setting the stage for the rest of their journey to the Promised Land.

Sermon Introduction

High performance teams, whether a sports team or a marketing team, always have synergy: multiple individuals working together to become greater than the sum of their parts.

Before the Israelites were ready to enter the Promised Land, they had to become more than just ex-slaves fleeing from Egypt, fighting for survival. They had to learn to live, work, and even fight together. Instead of individuals and their families only looking out for themselves, they had to become a community who together could accomplish more than they ever could on their own.

To become the people God has created us to be, we need more than strict individualism. There's something greater God does in and through us when we commit ourselves to the collaborative, synergistic, community, empowered by God, that we call "the church."

Passage: Exodus 17:8–18:27 (NIV)

The Amalekites Defeated

Ex. 17:8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.

Ex. 17:9 Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.”

Ex. 17:10 So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill.

Ex. 17:11 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.

Ex. 17:12 When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

Ex. 17:13 So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

Ex. 17:14 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”

Ex. 17:15 Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner.

Ex. 17:16 He said, “For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”

Visit from Jethro

Ex. 18:1 Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.

Ex. 18:2 After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her

Ex. 18:3 and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, “I have become an alien in a foreign land”;

Ex. 18:4 and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, “My father’s God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.”

Ex. 18:5 Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, together with Moses’ sons and wife, came to him in the desert, where he was camped near the mountain of God.

Ex. 18:6 Jethro had sent word to him, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons.”

Ex. 18:7 So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent.

Ex. 18:8 Moses told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them.

Ex. 18:9 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.

Ex. 18:10 He said, “Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians.

Ex. 18:11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly.”

Ex. 18:12 Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law in the presence of God.

Ex. 18:13 The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening.

Ex. 18:14 When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, “What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?”

Ex. 18:15 Moses answered him, “Because the people come to me to seek God’s will.

Ex. 18:16 Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and laws.”

Ex. 18:17 Moses’ father-in-law replied, “What you are doing is not good.

Ex. 18:18 You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.

Ex. 18:19 Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people’s representative before God and bring their disputes to him.

Ex. 18:20 Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.

Ex. 18:21 But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

Ex. 18:22 Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you.

Ex. 18:23 If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.”

Ex. 18:24 Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said.

Ex. 18:25 He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

Ex. 18:26 They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

Ex. 18:27 Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions

1. Read Exodus 17:8-16. Why do you think God chose to let the Israelites fight rather than simply wipe out the Amalekite warriors, as he did the Egyptian army? What's the significance of Moses holding up his hands?
2. In his work, *Contemplations*, the Puritan theologian Joseph Hall wrote, "In vain shall Moses be upon the hill, if Joshua be not in the valley." What do you think he's getting at?
3. In v. 14, God declares that he will "completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." Why was God so strongly opposed to those who opposed the Israelites? What does God's covenant with Abraham suggest about God's plan for Israel (cf. Genesis 12:1-3)?
4. Read Exodus 18:1-12. Jethro—a Midianite pagan priest—responds very differently to God's rescue of the Israelites than the Amalekites. Connecting this to your life, how have people responded when they've learned about how Jesus has rescued you? How do you think others would respond if they knew?
5. Read Exodus 18:13-27. As God's chosen representative, Moses was accustomed to hearing directly from God for direction. And yet, here Moses takes the advice of a Midianite pagan (though, perhaps newly converted) priest. Jethro even declares his advice is God's command (v. 23). What does this dynamic suggest about how God can teach us and from whom we can learn about how to live more wisely? Who (or what) are some of your favorite life "instructors"?

outside of explicitly “Christian” education?

6. Give 3 or more reasons why Jethro’s advice was so good both for Moses and the Israelites, but also in general. Can you think of an example from your life where empowering others created greater synergy? Is there a time you remember feeling empowered, maybe at work or as part of a team?
7. Why was it important for the Israelites to learn to fight (against the Amalekites) and live/function together? In what ways is that applicable for churches?
8. What do you think would be different about a church that serves its people vs. a church that empowers its people? Which church do you think would be a stronger and more effective witness to others?

Prayer

Often a position of submission helps us physically connect with the spiritual reality that occurs. A posture of kneeling with open hands can demonstrate our willingness to submit to God’s power.

- Praise God that he loved you, even when you raised your fist against him, and sent Jesus to rescue you.
- Confess any ways that you still struggle to accept his love and law in your life. Ask him to help you put your fist down.
- Thank him that, like Jethro, you can say, “I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods,” because Jesus not only died for our sins, but he rose from the dead so that all would know that he is the

Lord of lords, and King of kings.

- Ask God to work through you to empower others to live wisely and courageously. Be specific about someone you could encourage this week.