

## **Yitro (Jethro) Abundance**

**Torah:** Exodus 18:1-20:21 (23)

**Haftarah:** Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:6,7(5,6)

**Brit Chadashah:** Matthew 5:8-20

This portion of the Torah provides the foundation for all that was said previously in the Bible and all that will be said subsequently. Along with the first 11 chapters of Genesis, the giving of the Law is the most important section of the Bible. Even the Gospel and all of the teachings of the New Testament derive from these portions of Scripture. It is not surprising that liberal theologians and evolutionists consider the first eleven chapters of Genesis to be a series of myths and the Ten Commandments to be an adaptation of ancient Middle Eastern law codes.

I am currently reading through an academic atlas of Jewish history and while the gentleman is very well versed in history and in portions of the Bible, he begins his discussion by tracing the supposed origins of the Jewish people as one of many ancient Middle Eastern groups. From his statement, I feel that he would probably consider the first eleven chapters of Genesis as one of any number of creation myths, common throughout the ancient Middle East.

Many have it all wrong and base so much of what they say on presuppositions and on any number of modern myths about the origin of the world and even understanding the ancient world. If the first eleven chapters of Genesis are not inspired, then none of the Bible is inspired, because it is not divided between truth and legend. It is not legend and though we frequently would like more detail than the Bible gives, it is both true and accurate in what it says.

When mankind was scattered at the Tower of Babel, the new groups took with them portions and fragments of the knowledge that came down from Noah. World religions and myths may contain traces of the truth, but many creative additions were made over the years. There are no creative additions to be found anywhere in the Bible. What it says is true and while there is obviously more truth, beyond what it says, there is no truth which would contradict anything the Bible teaches.

Our portion begins with the people camping around the Holy Mountain, likely in tribal groups and extended families, with members of the mixed multitude sprinkled throughout the camp. There is a time gap between the victory over the Amalekites and the arrival of the people at the mountain of G-d. Muslims claim that the mountain of G-d is located in Saudi Arabia because Paul talks of Mount Sinai in Arabia. However, Mountain Sinai in the Sinai peninsula is called Moses' mountain in Arabic. When Rome conquered the Middle East, they divided it up in various provinces. The region of Sinai and a portion of the land of the Philistines was called the province of Arabia.

When the people arrived, they were apparently waiting for more instructions and may have been resting from their travels to this point. They still got manna every morning and always had access to a sufficient water supply. Jethro, who lives nearby, comes to the camp and brings back Moses' wife and his two sons. One of his sons is named Eliezer and should not be confused with Aaron's son, whose name he shared. Moses' wife Zipporah had likely been sent home to her father for her own protection and is now being returned by her father.

Jethro was a priest of Midian and when he arrives, he sends word to Moses and is then conducted through the crowds to Moses' tent. When he hears about all that YHVH has done for Israel, Jethro admits that YHVH is greater than all the gods. It is not necessarily a conversion, but it is step in the right direction. No priests have yet been set up in Israel, so Jethro leads the leadership of Israel in offering a burnt offering and sacrifices to YHVH. This is the first mention of sacrifices since the Exodus, so we learn that the first sacrifices made to the G-d of Israel were offered by a righteous Gentile.

The passage mentions them having a meal in the presence of G-d, but we are not told where this took place. It is likely that the presence of G-d hovered over the sacrifices and over the meal, likely in a cloud, because His full presence is still lethal.

The next day, Moses returned to judging the people and helping them to make the transition between any paganism they had picked up in Egypt and the laws and ordinances which Moses was teaching them. He sat down from the morning to the evening and there does not appear to be any organization in what is occurring and Jethro warns Moses that he is headed for a burn out. Also, because the people had to wait so long for their question to be answered, they would also burn out before very long. It is not mentioned whether Aaron and the elders helped out, but there was no apparent order in how the questions were asked.

Jethro recommends that Moses divide the people into leaders of 1,000, of 100, of 50 and of 10, so the smaller cases could be heard by the leaders of 10 and make their way up, until it would be presented to Moses, if none of the other leaders could answer it. We are not told that there was a period of training for these leaders, but what they could not deal with, from whatever knowledge they had, eventually made its way to Moses.

So there would be at least: 600 leaders of 1,000; 6,000 leaders of 100; 12,000 leaders of 50 and 60,000 leaders of 10. While Jethro is still there, the organization occurs, though the role of the seventy elders is not specified and it may be that they and Aaron were part of the court of final appeal, which Moses chaired. The camp now had a leadership of over 78,600 men!

Jethro is unwilling to stay in the camp because he already has a job to do and goes home, though we learn later that some of his sons and their families stayed behind. This probably meant that Jethro did not travel alone, but was part of a considerable camp, which would have ensured his safety. For our own safety, we also need to be part of our local camp!

On the third month after they left Egypt, on the first of Sivan, the children of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Sinai and set up camp around the mountain. Jethro did not meet them while they were on the way, but he visited the camp at the Mountain of G-d. Moses goes up the mountain for the first time and receives instructions from YHVH.

What follows is an Egyptian (hamatic) covenant formula, from the giving of the Ten to the discussions of the ten which followed in the next couple of chapters. The second giving of the Law on the plains of Moab, follows a Hittite (Semitic) covenant formula. These covenant formulas had at least three sections: (1) the general call for complete submission. (2) Covenant stipulations which outline basic theology and morality and (3) the application of these stipulations into any number of life situations.

YHVH tells His people that all the earth is His and that He has selected Israel from among all the peoples of the earth. He is declaring His singular universal sovereignty and wants the Jews to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This was to be the first stage in Israel taking this message to all the nations of mankind, so that they would abandon their pagan religious folly and return to the only true G-d.

When YHVH says that He brought His people out of Egypt on the wings of an eagle, it is a symbolic expression which says that their departure was from G-d and was not just something they did for themselves. Be careful not to take things literally which are meant literarily (symbolically). Just a quick note here. If any of you are being troubled by the flat earthers, lets talk about it and I will give you a quick course in making a clear distinction between the symbolic and the literal.

The flood and the tower of Babel were literal, but trees do not have hands and even if they suddenly grew hands, they do not clap their hands. Mountains do not skip like young goats and Israel is not a land which literally flows with milk and honey or the people would have found it sticky and full of sour milk.

Moses calls the elders and places before them all the words which YHVH has said (about them being a chosen people, called to be priests and holy) and the elders speak to all the people, in their thousands, their hundreds, their fifties and their tens. The entire people accept the call and agree to do all which YHVH is going to say to them.

Moses goes back up the mountain and from the text, we understand that he stood below one of the summits and the L-rd spoke to him from a cloud that hovered over the summit. Mount Sinai has three summits and people like to argue about which one YHVH used. Moses had a safe place to stand and was not in any danger of sliding back down the mountain when YHVH spoke to him. All through this going up and down, Joshua is not far behind.

The people are to be ready on the third day and since a third day reference is given twice (19:11 and 19:16), the giving of the Law occurred on the sixth of Sivan and this event has become of part of our celebrations of the festival of Shavuot (Pentecost).

The people are to set limits around the mountain, so that the presence of G-d on the mountain does not become lethal for any livestock or trespassers. Anyone who tried to breach this perimeter was killed either with stoning or by arrows. This was to prevent anyone from risking their life by retrieving the dead bodies once the intruders were inside the limits. This is the first time sanctioned stoning is mentioned, as well as capital punishment for specific capital offences against G-d.

From the top of the mountain, the people hear the sound of trumpets along with thunder and lightening, all of which came out of the cloud. The people were called to the base of the mountain, which was filled with smoke like a furnace. The mountain shook violently, so the ground around the mountain would also have shook. It was a very intimidating display and once it started, no one dared to approach any closer. Right away, a pattern is established which was followed the whole time the people were at the mountain

The trumpets, the fire and the thunder may have only been used during the giving of the ten covenant stipulations, but Moses would go up the mountain, from where YHVH would speak.

The volume of the trumpets increased loudly as Moses spoke to YHVH and as YHVH answered. His voice may have sounded like trumpet blasts or these blasts happened whenever He spoke. YHVH again warns the people not to go near the mountain to get better look, because if they did, many of them would perish.

This is the first mention of Jewish priests who were to be those who approached YHVH, while the rest of the people had to keep their distance. Now that the boundaries of the mountain are secured so that none of the people or their flocks would be killed, Moses is told to come back up the mountain with Aaron, while the elders kept the people at bay. It may have been that Aaron was present during the giving of the ten covenant stipulations, but when Moses went up the mountain for the longer periods, Aaron was left behind to watch over the people.

Though we are told that the ten covenant stipulations were written by the finger of G-d, it is likely that the rest of the applications and instructions for building the ark were written down by Moses onto some kind of scroll. By the end of the process, Moses has a book, which he is told to place beside the ark. Once Moses conveys the people's willingness to obey whatever YHVH tells them, he gets ready to receive the ten covenant stipulations.

Now Talmudic rabbis say that no special status should be given to these ten special words because they teach that all the other commandments of the Torah and the Talmud are of equal status and have equal authority. This is not true. The Ten Covenant Stipulations are the basis for all YHVH was going to say and do for His people. They alone were written on two stone tablets by YHVH Himself.

Well, Moses goes back up the mountain and as the cloud thunders with lightening and as the sound of trumpets is heard, one by one Moses receives the Covenant Stipulations. While some other Middle Eastern peoples also had law codes, the Ten Covenant Stipulations are unique and none of them is negotiable. Let us go through them one by one.

(1) First Stipulation. Because YHVH delivered them out of Egypt and from the house of servitude, they are not to have or to place any other gods before YHVH's face. The people are not yet completely monotheistic (a belief in one G-d), at this point, but they are told that they cannot have a divided spiritual devotion. With YHVH, it is always an all or nothing proposition. YHVH alone must be completely given all their spiritual devotion. No one else and nothing else is worthy of their spiritual devotion. This is true even in today's world.

(2) Second Stipulation. G-d is the Creator and as such, He is above all creation and nothing in creation, from an idol to the heavenly bodies themselves, should ever be used to make a likeness of G-d that would be used in worship. The entire universe cannot contain G-d, why should a statue or a figurine contain or represent Him? Nothing in the created world should be used in the worship of the Creator. Any representation of G-d is a form of idolatry and Israel was forbidden to make use of any such approximations of G-d.

It is in regard to this stipulation that a generational punishment is mentioned. To three or four generations should be understood to mean all the living generations. There is no such thing as a generational curse that impacts more than several generations over a period of years. Those who love YHVH and who keep His commandments will be blessed to a thousand generations. This does not mean that there are people being blessed to a thousand generations. This is a symbol of all the generations of mankind from the first to the last.

You cannot worship or even venerate the Creator through anything which is created. Polytheism (more than one god) is wrong, as is pantheism (everything is god or contains god). Devotional statues of any kind effectively break this stipulation. This does not apply to decorative or artistic statues and representations. Both the tabernacle and the temple had them.

(3) Third Stipulation. You shall not take YHVH's name in vain. This is not referring to the use of vulgar speech, but to making promises in G-d's name that do not come from Him. You can make certain vows in YHVH, like the Nazarite vow or the devoted to destruction vow, but three things. First, they must be made directly to G-d. Next, they must be made in accordance to His Word. Lastly, we cannot use G-d to guarantee our word or as a way of making sure we keep our promises.

YHVH is not a force and you cannot point Him at your enemies and you cannot use Him as some kind of collateral. He can never be relegated to a third party situation where you have somehow obliged Him to act without the promise coming directly from Him. G-d will never be triangulated or manipulated.

(4) Fourth Stipulation. The Sabbath is the seventh day and it is on this day only that G-d mandated rest and worship. We can rest on any day throughout the week and it is always good to worship G-d and give Him our praises, but there is only one day we are commanded to set apart for resting in Him. The Sabbath is a memorial to the creation and our Messiah, Yeshua, kept the Sabbath when He walked among us.

The change from the Sabbath to Sunday, was a cowardly way for the Gentile church to distance themselves from Israel when the Romans were passing legislation to punish the Jews. The Jews had to either worship in secret, or pay a considerable fine to worship on the Sabbath. There is no biblical justification ever given to justify a switch from worship on the seventh day to worship on the first day. In the year when our L-rd suffered, died, was buried and resurrected, the after three days resurrection, just happened to be on a Sunday – that is from sundown Saturday to sundown Sunday. Sunday is not the resurrection day, except only occasionally.

Because of the Jewish calendar, resurrection day can occur on any number of weekdays, including the Sabbath, but Sunday itself is never given a special status as a permanent holy day. This special status applies to the Sabbath and to the Sabbath alone. The Seder was on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, between sunset and full dark. He was arrested, tried, crucified and buried on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. He spent the 16<sup>th</sup>, the 17<sup>th</sup>, and the 18<sup>th</sup> of Nissan in the tomb. We know that His Spirit went to the remand centre of G-d and did a triage of the spirits who were asleep, but He rose sometime after sundown on the 18<sup>th</sup>, which, in Judaism, is the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Just as Passover and other Jewish festivals are always celebrated on the same day on the Jewish calendar, whatever day it happens to be on the secular calendar, we need to celebrate the resurrection on the 19<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. We have to keep the Sabbath as the only biblically mandated day of rest. The Scriptures never call Sunday a holy day.

When we are resting, our whole household has to rest – there is no room for a Shabbat goy (Sabbath servant) who does work for us. All in our household have to rest and no Gentile should be obliged to do work for us on the Sabbath. They should be resting with us.

Stipulations One to Four, form the first section of the Ten Stipulations and deal with how we are to relate to G-d. The next section deals with how we should relate to our family.

(5) Fifth Stipulation: we have to honour our mother and our father. They passed on Adam's blood to us and are our earthly life givers. They cared for us while we were growing up and we should always demonstrate our gratitude for this.

Now I know that some parents are abusive and others are manipulative and try to live their lives by controlling us. This kind of behaviour is wrong, but it does not negate the principle of showing respect for our parents, especially as they age and need help because they are no longer strong. We should help them in their weakness and never abandon them when they need us the most. However, honouring does not always mean obeying. We are to obey G-d.

This Stipulation constitutes the second section of the Stipulations and the last section deals with how we are to treat our fellow man.

(6) Stipulation Six. We are not to commit murder. This is not a stipulation which is against capital punishment, but just as we were born from a committee, any early end to our lives must be a valid committee decision. Wars are not good, but are sometimes necessary, so taking a life in a legitimate cause is also not wrong. Sometimes law enforcement has to use deadly force and this is not murder. Murder is ending someone else's life for an invalid reason, such as out of rage or passion or greed.

(7) Stipulation Seven. You shall not commit adultery. Since the Bible teaches that marriage is the only acceptable context for sexual activity, sexual activity which violates marriage is forbidden. This would also apply to premarital sex, extramarital sex, as well as sex with anyone you are not married to. The question of same sex marriage is dealt with later, but since two men cannot marry each other, all forms of homosexuality are also forbidden by this stipulation.

(8) Stipulation Eight. You shall not steal. The transfer of property must be a willing negotiation between two or more partners. The Americas were stolen from the indigenous peoples and I am glad that some effort is being made for truth and reconciliation. Petty theft is just as bad as grand larceny. We must respect each other's property rights. Finding something which someone has lost or thrown away is a different issue and returning whatever we have found to its rightful owner should be our first priority.

(9) Stipulation Nine. We must not bear false witness. We must not tell lies disguised as the truth, whether it is talking among ourselves or posting on social media. When I do not know something is true, I need to say so and not present it as if I were sure it was true. Lying is a form of verbal assault and the Torah forbids it.

(10) Stipulation Ten. You shall not covet anything or anyone who belongs to your neighbour. This does not mean we should not do our best to get ahead and want better things for ourselves, but it should never be at the expense of others. If we are not content with what we have, there are any number of good ways to improve ourselves, without turning on our friends and neighbours to do so.

The people heard the voice of G-d speaking the Ten Stipulations amidst the sound of trumpets and of thunder and they saw the cloud giving off lightening as the ground shook. This was done so that the people knew who they were dealing with directly and would show Him the fear and respect He deserves.

Every time, when Moses was on the mountain for a longer period, it was unlikely that the mountain would have continued to give off thunder and lightening as it shook and gave off loud trumpet sounds. It was a one time event with G-d speaking directly to His people and giving us His powerful Word. If we have to have a fireworks display in order to hear His Word, then we are missing the point. What He said to us was earth shattering, over and above the mighty spectacle that went with it.

The people now ask Moses to speak to them on G-d's behalf, because they are convinced that the words of Moses come from G-d. Later, when Moses spent a long time on the mountain, they had a spiritual network set up with Aaron and the elders acting as the final court of appeals. They should not have gotten up to any mischief.

Just after this final section of the Ten Stipulations, they are given three final reminders about how to relate to G-d. First, they were never to associate YHVH with any other gods, basically because He is the only G-d and all the others are fakes and demons. Next they are to build altars of earth and not of stone. The main altar for the tabernacle was made of gold covered wood or copper and not of stone.

When Joshua took the people through the Jordan river, he set up a monument of stones which is not the same thing as an altar. The pagans used stone altars and they defiled them when they worked on the stone and cut it into various pieces. We serve the Creator of heaven and earth and we should not construct altars from stone which we have shaped. Unshaped stones could be used as monuments, but no altar was to be made of stone.

Lastly, they were not to build their altars so high that priests going up them would reveal any nudity. People in those days did not wear undergarments and the high altars of the pagans sexualized worship.

Now that the Ten Stipulations are given, Moses is going to explain how to apply them and how to build a sanctuary for YHVH with no traces of paganism. These Stipulations were written on two stone tablets. There is no indication that the two stones were connected or that the words were only written on one side of each stone. These are Jewish urban myths. The fact that they were written by the finger of G-d is all that is important. What are you letting the finger of G-d write on your heart?