

Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation
 (Under same management for over 5785 years)
SHABBAT SERVICE February 15th - 10:30 AM
12:30PM Oneg Shabbat & Interactive Torah Discussion



"Blessed are those whose way of life is blameless;
who live by the Torah of Adonai.
Blessed are those who observe His instruction;
who seek Him with all their heart." Psalm 119

Yitro -- Jethro -- Exodus 18 - 20

וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר

Va-yish'ma Yitro cohen Midyan
 and heard Jethro priest of Midian,

choten Moshe et kol-asher
 father-in-law of Moses — all that

And Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard all that God had

עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ כִּי-הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:

asah Elohim l'Moshe ul'Yisra'el amo ki-hotsi Adonai et-Yisra'el mi-Mitsrayim.
 did Go for Moses and for Israel people-His that brought out the Lord — Israel from Egypt
done for Moses and for Israel; how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt.



Jethro, Priest of Midian

Haftarah – Isaiah 6:1-13

In the year of King Uzziah's (Azariah – 10th King of Judah) death (783 BC-742 BC), I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. And he touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips, and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I, send me!" And He said, "Go and tell this people: 'Keep on listening but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.' Render the hearts of this people insensitive; their ears dull and their eyes dim, lest they **see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts,** and **return and be healed.**" Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated and without inhabitants; houses are without people, and the land is utterly desolate. The Lord has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. Yet there will be a tenth portioning in it, and it will again be subject to burning. Like a terebinth (mighty) oak whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed (the coming Messiah) is its stump"

B'rit Chadashah -- Matthew 5:17-20

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law of the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The Return of Jethro

You will remember that "Jethro" was probably the title of the priest/ruler of the idolatrous Midianites (**Num.25:17-18**), living in the Southern Sinai region. His given name was Ruel (**Ex.2:18, Num.10:29**). Exodus, Chapter 4, related how Zipporah, the daughter of Ruel, had refused to allow Moses to circumcise their second son, Eliezer, causing Moses, who was still responsible to God for the disobedience, to become mortally sick. Even after Zipporah had circumcised Eliezer, her attitude was not one of obedience. Therefore she was sent back to live with her father in Midian, while Moses went on to Egypt. She did not get to experience God's power over the Egyptians, nor His deliverance of His redeemed people out of Egypt and across the Red Sea on dry ground. (Evidently the story of God's defeat of the Egyptian army had quickly spread, even to the nomadic tribes of the desert.) Jethro must have heard about God's miracle and returned to bring the wife of Moses, Zipporah, and their two sons Gershom

("stranger" or "sojourner"), and Eliezer ("God is my help"), who had been staying with him, while Moses was in Egypt.



My UMJC friend, **Matt Absolon, Congregation Leader of Beth T'fila in Miramar, Florida** states, "Much of biblical text is spent recounting the pitfalls and bad relationships that serve as examples of what *not* to do in our connections with each other. This week's portion gives us a welcome respite from that trend in showcasing the relationship between Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro. In the catalogue of family relationships that are notorious for being contentious, the "in-laws" take a special place at the top of the page. Regardless of this tendency, Moses and Jethro's relationship shared a special intimacy, one that echoes down to the modern-day friendship between Israel and the Druze peoples... Oftentimes the children-in-law expect care and concern to flow down to them while overlooking the duty they have to direct care and concern upwards to the parents-in-law.... As a first impression, we see that Moses maintains deep respect for Jethro. He "bowed down and kissed him." Moses keeps himself humble before Jethro and pays respect to both the man and the position of father-in-law. When navigating relationships, it is often helpful for us to differentiate between the person and the title they hold. When we honor our in-laws, we honor the position they hold, not just the person. This distinction helps us overlook dissimilarities in personality and allows us to honor our in-laws for who they are. If we can imagine for a moment the overwhelming situation that Jethro found before him, it would have been understandable for him to take a skeptical approach. In this hypothetical setting, Jethro could have logically asked the following: 'What are you thinking that you will lead two million people into the desert?' 'This was not the deal when you married Zipporah!' 'Moses, are you sure this is God's plan for your life?'Jethro did not fall into the trap of offering biting critique without a solution."

Discussion Question: What lessons might we learn from Moses and Jethro that can help us navigate our in-law relationships today?

Moses showed proper respect in greeting his father-in-law and recapitulated his time in Egypt and their journey toward Mt. Sinai. Jethro is thankful that the Lord delivered Moses and the people from Pharaoh. He even made sacrifices to the Lord. Some think that Jethro always was a believer in the Lord; some think that he just now became a believer in the Lord, after hearing how God had provided for Moses. Others think that Jethro never became a believer in the Lord. In verse 11, Jethro stated, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods..." The Midians like the Egyptians believed in a

whole pantheon of gods. Perhaps Jethro was acknowledging that he has now made the Hebrew God the chief of his gods. Just as we saw with Pharaoh, words of “confession & belief” do not always convey the meaning we might attach to them. Actions speak louder than words! If Jethro, the ruler and priest of the Midianites, had decided to embrace the God of Israel alone, and as the ruler & priest, made the Midianites rid themselves of all their other false gods, would God have issued the edict of **Numbers 25:17-18**, instructing Moses to be hostile to the Midianites for trying to seduce the men of Israel?

Counsel from the Father-in-Law

Chapter 18 is one of the few times in the Torah that we find counsel given by someone other than God. The usual protocol was that God announced His counsel to Moses. Then Moses communicated God's wishes to the people. Should counsel be taken from one, who is not necessarily a Godly person? In this case, God did not intervene to stop Moses from implementing the suggestion of Jethro to divide his authority among others. This division of authority involved **judicial administration, rather than authority over God's law or worship (theology).** Up until this time, Moses had been deciding disputes by himself....inquiring of God for his decisions. Jethro's counsel was for Moses to share the load by appointing honest, God-fearing men to settle the minor disputes, leaving Moses to take to God the major disputes. After receiving the law, Moses put these measures into effect (**Deut.1:13-19**).

Discussion Question: Today do we have people in charge of only our **judicial administration, but not authority over God's law or our worship?**



Moses chose able men out of all Israel....

The application for us is to understand that no one person can or should take it upon himself to accomplish everything in ministry. We would become "burned out." Being "burned out for God" does not accomplish His purposes, nor is it helpful for us and our witness. It has always been God's method to accomplish His plans through men and women. We facilitate God's plan by enabling others to become involved....and that shares the burden! The job description of a ministry leader is to be God's man/woman, feeding and caring for the people, keeping his flock doctrinally correct, and providing Godly vision for the congregation. Moses accepted the counsel of Jethro and chose Godly men to help in administrative duties.

On the Wings of Eagles



God paints a beautiful picture for Moses illustrating how God had borne the people "on eagle's wings" and brought them to Himself. This Hebrew idiom in scripture can denote a successful escape after being pursued (**Revelation.12:14**). **Deuteronomy 32:11** explains how God takes care of His people, as an eagle cares for her young, hovering over them and teaching them to fly, while guarding and protecting them from harm. **Israel**, as God's people, **would never be alone; would never be assimilated; would never become extinct!** God wanted His people to live in covenantal relationship with Him, obeying the laws He was about to give them, as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."



Mount Sinai Today with St. Catherine's Monastery

Three months after leaving Egypt, Moses led the people from Rephidim into the wilderness of Sinai. They camped on a large, flat plain in front of Mt. Sinai, fulfilling God's promise to Moses in **Ex.3:1,12**, to bring him and the people to this very mountain.

As a prelude to coming before their holy God, the people had to "consecrate" themselves; to purify themselves physically and spiritually and forego earthly pleasures and thoughts. There was a long blast of the shofar to signal the assembly of the people to approach God. The Shofar blast that calls us to our Shabbat celebration reflects this worldly separation as we prepare for worship. Involved is a process of purification, so that the focus of God's people is wholly on God. Today we might call this process "getting right before God." This might involve our confession of sin and our promise of obedience to God. Before they could stand before God, they must be ceremonially clean. We, too, should learn this lesson of being "clean" before God.

Discussion Question: How can our congregation become focused on God **prior** to beginning our worship service?

When God approached, He descended on Mt. Sinai with fire and the smoke of a furnace. The whole mountain quaked. Thunder and lightning like the sound of a trumpet became louder and louder, terrifying the people. **Hebrews 12:18-21** describes the scene as "terrible," causing Moses to fear and tremble. Today it is popular to say, "God is love" and treat Him as our buddy. That was not the experience of Moses and the people of Israel. **As we come into God's presence, let us be grateful for the atonement He has provided but also mindful that we are in the presence of a holy God!**

"The Law is Holy, and the Commandment is Holy, Righteous, and Good." (Romans 7:12)



Exodus Chapter 20 is **one of the most important, if not the most important chapter of the whole Torah!** Here God began to give us His law...."The Ten Words" or as we know them, the Ten Commandments. **The Ten Commandments are considered the bedrock of our faith!** **When they are read in the synagogue, it is a tradition for the entire congregation to rise in reverence and awe.** 1) I am the Lord your God. 2) You shall not make an idol for worship. 3) You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain. 4) Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. 5) Honor your father and your mother. 6) You shall not murder. 7) You shall not commit adultery. 8) You shall not steal. 9) You shall not bear false witness. 10) You shall not covet.



Discussion: Are God's laws Absolute?

God has given his people basic commandments to govern their everyday lives. In the last several verses of this parsha, God amplifies on the second commandment, telling the people to not make other gods for themselves and to make an altar to worship Him in the place of His choosing. In the next parasha, **Mishpatim** - Judgments, God will continue to expand on these basic 10 commandments. So we must ask, **if God immediately expands on His commandments, as time marches on and society changes, should we also expand on our understanding of how to keep God's commandments? Are God's commandments absolute?** The world has changed dramatically since God's people were given the Torah. We are no longer an agrarian based society. We no longer have the same sense of community as did the people to whom the commandments were given. Our society is technology driven, coupled with advanced communication and transportation, enabling communities to live in widely disbursed areas. Therefore, does **God hold that His people should obey His commandments in the same way as they were originally given in Torah?**

Although within Judaism this is a controversial area, my opinion is that today **we do need to keep the spirit of God's commandments as they were originally given.** I was once challenged, 1) "Do we really understand what God considers stealing? If someone owes me money, can I not take something of value of his without it being considered stealing?" 2) "Do we really understand in our modern world what God considers work that we should not do on the Sabbath?" (For example, walking to Shabbat services, rather than driving. And how far can we walk before the walking becomes "work?") 3) Many live in high rise apartment buildings. Since walking up many

flights of stairs is certainly work, can we take an elevator (making electricity, which is also considered work) or should we be content to remain in our homes on Shabbat?

So much has been written by ancient and modern Rabbinical scholars to define these terms, how can a simple, modern-day individual understand and be held accountable for keeping these commandments? My answer is that the everyday individual does not need halachic Rabbinic textbooks to interpret law Jewish in order to obey God's commandments. Because the Torah is written on our hearts (Jer.31:30-34; Heb.8:9-12), we intuitively know what constitutes stealing or work on the Sabbath that should be avoided. Although we might try to get our own way by seeking religious loopholes, we are only obfuscating what we intuitively know to be God's commandments. The only question is whether we can sublimate our will to God's will and obey the spirit of His commandments, as He would want us to do. If our motivation is to please God, the Ruach Hakodesh - the Holy Spirit will make God's will clear to us and convict us, when we go astray. Messianic Jews and Gentiles, who listen to God's spirit, can intuitively understand what God wants! "Listening to God's Spirit" involves reading His scripture and quietly listening to His still, small voice within us.

Some non-messianic Jews may give more adherence to the written and oral interpretations of the law than to the Torah itself. Because there is so much Rabbinic and scholarly discussion about what constitutes keeping God's individual laws, they can never be sure that they are fully keeping God's law. They can never have the assurance (given by the Ruach) that they have pleased our Holy God with sins removed and can therefore approach Him in worship. They will never feel completely worthy to come before Him. Because they work to achieve God's favor, they can never do enough! To soothe their consciences, they change the spirit of God's law to suit themselves. For example: "If someone owes me money, and I take something of value from him, it is really not stealing." "My neighborhood strings a cable between telephone-like poles around the neighborhood, that creates an eruv, a special area, where some work can be done on Shabbat without violating God's Sabbath laws." "Although I'm not allowed to turn on a light switch on Shabbat, I can light candles before the Sabbath and use their light throughout Shabbat." "I cannot drive to services, but I can drive miles to within several blocks of the synagogue (within the eruv) and walk from there."

I would separate tradition from legalism. It is all right to keep traditions, but don't expect to substitute Rabbinic tradition for keeping the spirit of God's law, as He would want. Religious tradition can never produce justification (being declared not guilty) by God! Only Messiah, Yeshua, can accomplish that, through His finished, sacrificial atonement, allowing us to approach God with sins removed, having perfect assurance that we have pleased Him by keeping His commandments and are walking by His Spirit.

Discussion: Is It Possible to Keep All of God's Laws?

As we continue through the Torah next week, we will find that God gave His people a total of 613 laws to obey. However, these 10 commandments are the basis for all of God's laws and mark the spiritual birth of Israel, as we enter into a covenantal

relationship with God and agree to abide by His laws. They are the basis of the "law of Messiah." **We are to keep the Torah the way Messiah kept the Torah in His day.** (See Stern's Messianic Jewish Manifesto pp. 125-187). Also read **Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, and 43....(You have heard it said....but I say unto you....).**

The purpose of God's law is not the means by which God declares us "righteous." God declares us "righteous" because of our faith apart from His law (Romans 3:20, 28). However, **God's commandments found throughout the Torah and B'rit Hadashah reveal His standard of holiness; His idea of how His people were to live their lives. God's commandments provide God's standard for how God defines sin: breaking God's laws.** Interestingly, by knowing the commandments and therefore what God says is sin, **our human nature makes us sin more.** When we hear, "Thou shalt not..." our human nature (the evil inclination - the "yitzer ha-ra") says, "Oh yes I will!" And as we realize the utter futility of our trying in vain to keep all of God's law, we are driven to God in our own helplessness (**Romans.7:15-24**). We are not capable of becoming righteous before God by keeping all the "mitzvot" (commandments) - Galatians 3:21-25. But thanks be to God for..."God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (**Galatians 4:4-5, Romans 8:15-17**). **As we experience God's redemption from Egypt, remindful of our coming Passover service, let us really appreciate our redemption from sin by Messiah, Yeshua's finished work for us!**

SHABBAT SHALOM

Remembering our friend and Board Member, Wally Tucker

After a car accident four years ago while in Walla Walla, Wally Tucker had a stroke and is now in God's presence.



Announcements:

- 1) Passover, 1st Seder, Monday April 12th
- 2) UMJC International Summer Conference, Boston, July 17-21

