

A People with a Promise: Exodus 18

Read Exodus 18. Pray that God's Spirit would help you to understand and apply the passage to your own lives.

1) How good are you at taking advice or criticism:

- from another Christian?
- from someone with different beliefs?

2) How does Deuteronomy 7.6-9 help us to understand how God feels about people and nations? Does God love someone because he sees the potential in them or regardless of their potential, their background, experiences etc? Does this verse help us with our grasp of God's love for us?

3) In what ways is the New Covenant better than the Old Covenant? See notes below especially Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel, Matt 26:28, 2 Cor 3:7-18 (and if time - Heb Chs 7-10)

4) The Old Covenant people of God were tasked with making the true God known to the nations through their communal and individual lives. The author Carl Trueman concludes that the early church (the New Covenant people) saw growth through;

'Existing as a close-knit, doctrinally bounded community that required her members to act consistently with their faith and to be good citizens of the earthly city as far as good citizenship was compatible with faithfulness to Christ.'

What does this mean and how can we live it, individually and in community?

Extra notes:

So, we learnt in Exodus 18 that God's people, the Israelites/Jews are a covenant community. A covenant is an agreement between two participants – but it's not like a marriage where the two make an agreement as equals. A Covenant is **from someone who can to someone who can't** e.g. will: "I will leave you £1,000,000 but have to die hair Red!", or a 'restrictive covenant on a house – "You may not keep a caravan on the drive". You or I can't change the covenant – what I have to do is accept – what is often a gracious offer and live with it.

Back both to Noah and to Abram God's covenant promise is for the good of Noah and his family & then childless Abram, his descendants to come. Gen 18.19 God covenants: I will give you land and descendants You will live differently (and the sign will be circumcision – the cutting of the male child's foreskin on the 8th day) & through you all nations will be blessed.

It's significant although Israel forgot & perhaps even now forgets that God's blessing was not to be kept to themselves be a light to all nations. Now as we meet the covenant people of God in Exodus (did you note earlier in our series in Ch 2 & 6 God speaks of his covenant community – and later in Deuteronomy Ch7 we discover on what basis God makes a Covenant with them)

In Exodus Ch 18 he's about to give them rules for that living and also regular worship practices that will mark them out and which need Judges to help them understand how to apply them in community & individual life. Notice also covenants were agreed with a sign or seal – often the shedding of blood.

But Israel failed to keep the covenant, following the ways of the people around them and their (false) gods. Their disobedience is a recurrent feature of the Historical Books:

Samuel, Kings etc + see Elijah -& Nehemiah's prayer to the covenant keeping God & much of Jeremiah and although they deserve to be cut off from the land and destroyed as a nation God has a plan. And this is where it gets exciting! In the prophecies of Isaiah & Jeremiah we start with hints of an everlasting covenant, a covenant of the Spirit of God: Isaiah 42:6-7, Jeremiah 31-32, Ezekiel 16 & 36:22ff

Then in the New Testament (= New Covenant) you might recall the words from Luke's gospel we use at the Communion service?

"In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

Read also 2 Corinthians 3 onwards & Hebrews chs 8-13. They are full of this New Covenant sealed through Jesus' blood shed on the cross and by which God offers us a Covenant written from inward on our hearts by His Spirit given as a gift to all believers.