

## **Torahtel – Wireless Communication for a Nation Set Apart**

### *A lesson on Parashah 17 – Yitro (Jethro)*

*By Kevin Phipps*

How many of you know the 10 Commandments? I'd guess that would be most of you. You probably even know them in order, which is a surprisingly difficult task for the average Christian. As I read and studied the giving of the 10 Commandments, I noticed some common misconceptions surrounding this event. I have a few questions for you.

Q: How many tablets were the 10 Commandments written on (in this parashah)?

A: Most of you probably went with the answer of 2. Some of you may have thought a little harder, and remembering the breaking of the first 2 at the golden calf incident said 4. Both answers are incorrect. The 10 Commandments were not chiseled in stone in this parashah. The Commandments are given to Moshe on stone tablets in chapter 31 of Sh'mot in parashah Ki Tissa. But, the 10 Commandments were originally spoken in this parashah Yitro.

Q: How many people does God directly talk to at the giving of the 10 commandments?

A: There were 600,000 men who left Egypt, which does not count women and children. Accounting for such would give an estimate of 1-2 million people in the nation of Israel at the time of the giving of the 10 Commandments. I assume that only the 600,000 men of Israel are actually gathered at Mt. Sinai. However, these people only experienced the thunder, lightning, the sound of the shofar, and the mountain smoking, not the actual voice of God. [20:15(18)] Moshe was the mediator between God and the people of Israel as alluded to in 20:16(19). So the answer to the question would be one.

Q: How many people did Moshe give the 10 Commandments and other messages from God to?

A: Not 600,000 people, as this would be impossible. However, within hours of Moshe first communicating the 10 Commandments, all 600,000 men of Israel knew the Commands of God, agreed to follow them, and the consensus of agreement returned back to Moshe to pass on to God. How was this done? Now for the lesson.

At the beginning of the parashah, we see one man, Moshe, attempting to lead, teach, and judge an entire nation of over one million people, one person at a time. His father-in-law sees this and though he was not a rocket scientist, could still see that this was not a good thing. It was not good for Moshe. He alone was spending his entire day talking to people, teaching them the ways of God, and settling their disputes. Eventually, he would burn out and Israel's fearless leader would be useless to them. It was not good for Israel, because how can over a million people be effectively lead and taught the ways of God by one man? Even with Aharon helping him, this would be impossible. Yitro had an idea.

He devised a hierarchy of leadership throughout Israel, in which Moshe and each leader under him would only deal with ten or fewer subordinate leaders directly. Based on what I have gathered from Scripture, it would have looked something like this. Capable men, who were competent, God-fearing, honest, and incorruptible (18:21) were chosen as leaders of Israel. At the bottom level, there would be leaders over groups of ten or fewer other men, (who themselves would be leaders in their families, to include women and children) Those “leaders of tens” would themselves be put in groups of five with a leader over them. This

leader would be a “leader of fifties” because five leaders of ten men each would be fifty. Keep in mind, these numbers are not exact, and most likely varied depending on the numbers of families, clans, and other factors within each tribe. These numbers are approximate numbers to give an idea of how the hierarchy of leadership and communication worked. The “leaders of fifties” would have then been separated into groups of two or three, perhaps with a leader of them who would be the “leader of hundreds”. These “leaders of hundreds” may have then been in groups of about ten with a leader over them who was a “leader of thousands”. These leaders may have had a leader over them who would answer to one of possibly five leaders of each tribe, who had one main tribal leader over them. This tribal leader would have approximately 50 to 60 thousand men under him, but would only deal directly with five. Why five? The tribal leader and the five subordinates equal 6 tribal leaders, which multiplied by the number of tribes, minus the tribe of Levi, which would be 11, equal 66 leaders of Israel. Add to that Moshe, Aaron, Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu, mentioned at the time Moshe went up the mountain for forty days and nights to receive the tablets containing the entire Torah, and you get the 70 leaders of Israel, also mentioned at the same time. Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, and Avihu represented the tribe of Levi, and most likely shared leadership over Israel, lest Israel acknowledge Moshe as their king, rather than God. Again, the exact details of this is just a theory, but the hierarchy of leadership and communication in Israel would have been at least similar.

What part did this play in the 10 Commandments? It was vital. In my scenario, there are only 8 levels of leadership, with the number of men included in each level increasing exponentially with each level, until it includes the entire nation. How long does it take for one person to pass a message to another person, to another person, eight times? Even accounting for some travel time for each leader to get to his respective subordinate group of leaders, the message could be conceivably passed through all 8 levels in an hour or two. What's more, is each leader can gather a consensus reply from their group, and pass the information back up the chain in not much more time than it took for the message to come down. Thus, perhaps the first wireless communication network in history. So efficient would this method of communication be, that it rivals more sophisticated modern methods of communication we have today. In fact, the entire nation of Israel probably knew the 10 Commandments in less time than it took for every American to become aware of the terrorist attacks on our country on September 11.

Why do churches have prayer chains? Because one phone call to one person with a concern or need can have an entire church of a thousand people praying for you and possibly rendering assistance in a matter of minutes. Perhaps Yitro was a rocket scientist before his time after all. Incidentally, the military has the same hierarchy of command, so that if the President of the United States wanted to pass a message to the troops, virtually every member of the armed forces would have the message most likely within the hour.

What purpose did God have for the entire nation of Israel having the 10 Commandments, when the “unabridged” Torah was coming around the corner? Moshe was about to be gone from their midst for forty days and nights receiving the Torah. As it was, they violated at least one of the commands in Moshe's absence with the abbreviated version of Torah, what might they have done without it? They needed a basic idea of what God expected of them, so they would have a basic idea how to live as the “nation of cohanim” God intended for them to be. They had been taken out of Egypt, and Egypt had been taken out of them, supposedly. But, they had to remain separate from the wickedness of Egypt and the pagan nations they

were about to conquer. The 10 Commandments gave them a basic concept of how to do that until Moshe could return with the more detailed Torah. These 10 laws also provided the foundation for the other 613 to follow. Being more general in nature, the 10 Commandments also apply to other cultures where people desire to also be “set apart” as holy before the God of Israel.

The 10 Commandments provided the backdrop for the expanded Torah to come. When those tablets were brought down the mountain, they did not negate the original 10, any more than the two greatest Commands of love for God and your neighbor negate the rest of Torah, which comes out of them. The roots of a tree provide a foundation for the tree, without which the tree cannot live or stand. At the same time, healthy roots will not live long without a tree growing from them.

Knowledge of Torah cannot be known if God's leaders fail to effectively communicate His truth to others. One person cannot reach a lost world alone. A lost world cannot be “found” with only a few working to tell them. It takes a network of God's people working together, to lead them in the ways of God. We communicate first by example, but our example has to be followed by the best wireless communication network in the world. The spoken word in the community of Messiah.

Can you hear me now?