

Exodus Chapter Eighteen

Read **Exodus 18:1-12** – Moses, Jethro & Zipporah

v.1 “WHEN JETHRO, THE PRIEST OF MIDIAN, MOSES' FATHER IN LAW, HEARD OF ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE FOR MOSES, AND FOR ISRAEL HIS PEOPLE, *and* THAT THE **LORD** HAD BROUGHT ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT;”

Commentators take issue with the translation of this verse. The original Hebrew that is translated “FATHER-IN-LAW” literally means “relative by marriage”. As we should remember from our earlier study:

EXODUS 2:17-19 “AND THE SHEPHERDS CAME AND DROVE THEM AWAY: BUT MOSES STOOD UP AND HELPED THEM, AND WATERED THEIR FLOCK. AND WHEN THEY CAME TO REUEL THEIR FATHER, HE SAID, HOW *is it that ye* ARE COME SO SOON TO DAY? AND THEY SAID, AN EGYPTIAN DELIVERED US OUT OF THE HAND OF THE SHEPHERDS, AND ALSO DREW *water* ENOUGH FOR US, AND WATERED THE FLOCK.”

So the women that Moses helped at the well were the daughters of Reuel. In due time Moses chose one of them as his wife:

Exodus 2:21 “AND MOSES WAS CONTENT TO DWELL WITH THE MAN: AND HE GAVE MOSES ZIPPORAH HIS DAUGHTER”

So the father-in-law of Moses in Exodus 2 is Reuel. Consequently the commentators contend that Jethro was not the father-in-law of Moses. And since the Hebrew is literally “relative by marriage” they contend that he is a brother-in-law instead. However as our study continues in this very chapter you will find Jethro referred to as the father-in-law of Moses over and over. As we noted in our study of **Exodus 2:18**, the name Jethro was possibly a title rather than a name. If so there would be no contention as Moses' father-in-law's name could be Reuel and his title Jethro.

v.2 “THEN JETHRO, MOSES' FATHER IN LAW, TOOK ZIPPORAH, MOSES' WIFE, AFTER HE HAD SENT HER BACK,”

At some point during his stay in Egypt, Moses had apparently either sent Zipporah back to her father or she had returned of her own accord. So when Israel nears the place where Moses was tending the flocks of Reuel, Jethro brings her to join him.

v.3 “AND HER TWO SONS; OF WHICH THE NAME OF THE ONE WAS GERSHOM; FOR HE SAID, I HAVE BEEN AN ALIEN IN A STRANGE LAND:

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Moses and Zipporah had two sons. This is mentioned by Stephen in his sermon before the Sanhedrin:

Acts 7:29 “THEN FLED MOSES AT THIS SAYING, AND WAS A STRANGER IN THE LAND OF MADIAN, WHERE HE BEGAT TWO SONS.”

The name given the oldest son means “sojourner”, in fact the word alien in the KJV is translated sojourner in the ASV and ESV and stranger in the NKJV.

v.4 “AND THE NAME OF THE OTHER WAS ELIEZER; FOR THE GOD OF MY FATHER, SAID HE, WAS MINE HELP, AND DELIVERED ME FROM THE SWORD OF PHARAOH:”

The second son was named Eliezer because Moses said that the “GOD OF MY FATHER...WAS MINE HELP.” The name Eliezer means “God is help”. God had delivered Moses from the sword of Pharaoh because after he killed the Egyptian taskmaster, Pharaoh sought to kill Moses causing him to flee to Midian.

v.5 “AND JETHRO, MOSES' FATHER IN LAW, CAME WITH HIS SONS AND HIS WIFE UNTO MOSES INTO THE WILDERNESS, WHERE HE ENCAMPED AT THE MOUNT OF GOD:”

Adam Clarke in his commentary takes issue with when this meeting between Moses and Jethro actually took place versus where it is recorded in the scripture. This verse says that Jethro came to Moses when Israel was camped “AT THE MOUNT OF GOD”. However, in the chronology of Israel’s travels as record in Exodus they have not left Rephidim yet as we will see in our study of chapter 19. So he contends that while the events of this chapter are recorded here they actually happened at a later date. Since the chapter opens and closes with the visit of Jethro and stands apart from the surrounding chapters he may be correct. That doesn’t diminish the fact that it inspired word of God (**II Timothy 3:16-17**) and record and preserved for “OUR LEARNING”, (**Romans 15:4**).

v.6 “AND HE SAID UNTO MOSES, I THY FATHER IN LAW JETHRO AM COME UNTO THEE, AND THY WIFE, AND HER TWO SONS WITH HER.”

v.7 “AND MOSES WENT OUT TO MEET HIS FATHER IN LAW, AND DID OBEISANCE, AND KISSED HIM; AND THEY ASKED EACH OTHER OF *their* WELFARE; AND THEY CAME INTO THE TENT.”

What does the word obeisance that is used in the KJV mean? In both the NKJV and the ESV the original language is translated “BOWED DOWN”. As we should remember Jethro is both a priest of God and ruler over his tribe or group of people:

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Exodus 2:16 “NOW THE PRIEST OF MIDIAN HAD SEVEN DAUGHTERS: AND THEY CAME AND DREW WATER, AND FILLED THE TROUGHS TO WATER THEIR FATHER'S FLOCK.”

So Moses was simply offering the token of honor that he would a ruler, priest and the elder leader of the family that he had married into.

The kiss is a greeting of friendship much as we would today with a handshake or a hug. Then, also as we would today if we meet someone that we haven't seen for some time, they exchange family news and inquiries regarding their general welfare.

Adam Clarke in his commentary, in keeping with his contention that this event occurred at a later date, also says that the tent referred to is the tabernacle. None of the other three commentators that I have read in this study even mention it.

v.8 “AND MOSES TOLD HIS FATHER IN LAW ALL THAT THE **LORD** HAD DONE UNTO PHARAOH AND TO THE EGYPTIANS FOR ISRAEL'S SAKE, AND ALL THE TRAVAIL THAT HAD COME UPON THEM BY THE WAY, AND *how* THE **LORD** DELIVERED THEM.”

Moses does the same thing that we would have done in his position. He tells Jethro of all of the things that have transpired since he saw him last and how God has so greatly blessed Israel.

v.9 “AND JETHRO REJOICED FOR ALL THE GOODNESS WHICH THE **LORD** HAD DONE TO ISRAEL, WHOM HE HAD DELIVERED OUT OF THE HAND OF THE EGYPTIANS.”

We see here the character of Jethro. He has 2-3 million people that have come into the area where he grazes his herds and flocks. Their numbers could very likely have totally overwhelmed the Midianite people. But rather than being an adversary of Israel, Jethro shares their joy at being delivered from the slavery of Egypt.

Through this we see the providence of God. Not only did God lead and protect his people during their journey to Canaan and their wanderings in the Sinai Peninsula but he protected the livelihood of the people though whose land Israel was passing. Otherwise this great number of people and their flocks and herds would have completely devastated what little graze or forage was available.

v.10 “AND JETHRO SAID, BLESSED *be* THE **LORD**, WHO HATH DELIVERED YOU OUT OF THE HAND OF THE EGYPTIANS, AND OUT OF THE HAND OF PHARAOH, WHO HATH DELIVERED THE PEOPLE FROM UNDER THE HAND OF THE EGYPTIANS.”

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Jethro, as a believer and priest of God, now honors and worships God giving Him praise for the deliverance of Israel. We find very similar praise and honor among the psalms of David:

Psalm 68:19-20 "BLESSED BE THE LORD, WHO DAILY LOADETH US *with benefits, even* THE GOD OF OUR SALVATION. SELAH. HE *that is* OUR GOD IS THE GOD OF SALVATION; AND UNTO **GOD** THE LORD BELONG THE ISSUES FROM DEATH."

We are also reminded by Paul that God is indeed the source of all spiritual blessings:

Ephesians 1:3 "BLESSED *be* THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO HATH BLESSED US WITH ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN HEAVENLY *places* IN CHRIST:"

v.11 "NOW I KNOW THAT THE **LORD** IS GREATER THAN ALL GODS: FOR IN THE THING WHEREIN THEY DEALT PROUDLY HE WAS ABOVE THEM."

Jethro acknowledges that the Lord, that is Jehovah God of heaven, is greater than any and all the gods that men worship. In the terms "DEALT PROUDLY", he is indicating the slavery that results when men worship gods of their own making and hold to ways of living corrupted by the lusts and desires of men. Jehovah God is "ABOVE THEM" or as other translations read "AGAINST THEM."

v.12 "AND JETHRO, MOSES' FATHER IN LAW, TOOK A BURNT OFFERING AND SACRIFICES FOR GOD: AND AARON CAME, AND ALL THE ELDERS OF ISRAEL, TO EAT BREAD WITH MOSES' FATHER IN LAW BEFORE GOD."

Jethro, acting as a priest of God, now makes burnt offerings and sacrifices unto God. Most people seem to equate these kinds of sacrifices with the Mosaic Covenant and it alone but we see that these acts of worship were conducted at various times and places from the very beginning of time.

Abel offered a "MORE EXCELLENT" sacrifice than Cain because he offered the "FIRSTLINGS" and "FAT" of the animals under his care (**Genesis 3:4**).

When Jacob returned from Haran and had to confront Laban when they settled their differences they worshipped and feasted:

Genesis 31:54 "THEN JACOB OFFERED SACRIFICE UPON THE MOUNT, AND CALLED HIS BRETHREN TO EAT BREAD: AND THEY DID EAT BREAD, AND TARRIED ALL NIGHT IN THE MOUNT."

And the very reason that Pharaoh was given for letting Israel go into the wilderness was to worship and sacrifice before God.

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Read **Exodus 18:13-27** – Jethro's Advice

v.13 “AND IT CAME TO PASS ON THE MORROW, THAT MOSES SAT TO JUDGE THE PEOPLE: AND THE PEOPLE STOOD BY MOSES FROM THE MORNING UNTO THE EVENING.”

I can only imagine the number of disputes that would arise among 2-3 million people who have a tendency to grumble and complain at the slightest provocation. I also see here their greatest failing of people who have little or no experience with managing or supervising others. Moses is trying to do everything himself and today we would say that he's headed for a physical and emotional burnout.

We're not told the nature of what is being brought before him, Clarke speculates in his commentary, but we don't know because the scripture doesn't tell us. But Moses was occupied from “MORNING UNTO THE EVENING” just trying to act as judge for his people.

v.14 “AND WHEN MOSES' FATHER IN LAW SAW ALL THAT HE DID TO THE PEOPLE, HE SAID, WHAT *is* THIS THING THAT THOU DOEST TO THE PEOPLE? WHY SITTEST THOU THYSELF ALONE, AND ALL THE PEOPLE STAND BY THEE FROM MORNING UNTO EVEN?”

Jethro has a very pertinent question and a valid concern about what Moses is doing.

v.15 “AND MOSES SAID UNTO HIS FATHER IN LAW, BECAUSE THE PEOPLE COME UNTO ME TO ENQUIRE OF GOD:”

Moses' response is that the people come to him to “ENQUIRE OF GOD”. This was the purpose for which God chose Moses:

Exodus 3:14 “AND GOD SAID UNTO MOSES, **I AM THAT I AM**: AND HE SAID, THUS SHALT THOU SAY UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, **I AM** HATH SENT ME UNTO YOU.”

And Moses continued in that role for the rest of his entire life:

Numbers 9:8 “AND MOSES SAID UNTO THEM, STAND STILL, AND I WILL HEAR WHAT THE **LORD** WILL COMMAND CONCERNING YOU.”

Numbers 27:5 “AND MOSES BROUGHT THEIR CAUSE BEFORE THE **LORD**.”

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But it seems that this whole thing has gone way too far and that the people of Israel are bringing Moses all manner of disputes, disagreements and problems to hear and solve, not just those matters that requires God assistance or direction.

v.16 “WHEN THEY HAVE A MATTER, THEY COME UNTO ME; AND I JUDGE BETWEEN ONE AND ANOTHER, AND I DO MAKE *them* KNOW THE STATUTES OF GOD, AND HIS LAWS.”

And “WHEN THEY HAVE A MATTER”; Moses apparently did not consider that some matters are far less important than others. Such is the nature of people and of leaders of people. When one has proven to be a fair judge, considerate to the rights and needs of others, he will be called upon more and more as time goes by to provide the kind of judgment that Moses was being tasked to provide. It becomes a trap just as Moses now finds himself caught in. Jethro is going to give Moses some advice that is invaluable.

v.17 “AND MOSES' FATHER IN LAW SAID UNTO HIM, THE THING THAT THOU DOEST *is* NOT GOOD.”

First of all this situation is not good; for more reasons than the Holy Spirit records for us here.

v.18 “THOU WILT SURELY WEAR AWAY, BOTH THOU, AND THIS PEOPLE THAT *is* WITH THEE: FOR THIS THING *is* TOO HEAVY FOR THEE; THOU ART NOT ABLE TO PERFORM IT THYSELF ALONE.”

Jethro sees the danger. This constant, daily sitting and dealing with the problems and disputes of these people is going to destroy Moses physically and emotionally. The people are going to get tired of waiting for their problems to be settled for them and grow more impatient with Moses than they are already. Moses saw the danger as well and recorded it for all to see down through time:

Deuteronomy 1:12 “HOW CAN I MYSELF ALONE BEAR YOUR CUMBRANCE, AND YOUR BURDEN, AND YOUR STRIFE?”

v.19 “HEARKEN NOW UNTO MY VOICE, I WILL GIVE THEE COUNSEL, AND GOD SHALL BE WITH THEE: BE THOU FOR THE PEOPLE TO GOD-WARD, THAT THOU MAYEST BRING THE CAUSES UNTO GOD:”

Jethro is a man of God, a priest of God, a ruler in his own right and apparently more experienced than Moses. If Moses will follow his advice then God will be with him. First of all he is to function as the mediator for the people of Israel with God.

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That is Moses most important and primary place. The day to day matters that he apparently is currently judging have to be handled some other way.

v.20 “AND THOU SHALT TEACH THEM ORDINANCES AND LAWS, AND SHALT SHEW THEM THE WAY WHEREIN THEY MUST WALK, AND THE WORK THAT THEY MUST DO.”

Clarke in his commentary allows that this is a good pattern for preachers to follow. 1.) They should instruct their congregations in the nature, use and importance of the laws of God. 2.) They should lay before the people, not just the ecclesiastical laws or ordinances but the moral law of God as well. Teach them how to conduct themselves in their daily living. He makes a distinction between the laws pertaining to worship, sacrifice and the governing of the church and the moral code for right living that is probably reflective of his denominational background. I don't think there is a difference. 3.) He is to point out what is right in each and every situation that arises. In his teaching, yes but here is where we part company as Clarke's belief in the pastor system is coming forth and he's now gone into the duties and responsibilities of the elders. It is the same with point 4; they must set the people about their work and make sure that they do it. This is not the role of an evangelist, but the role of an elder.

This is the advice that Jethro is giving Moses and through it a form of government will be established that will solve the problem at hand.

v.21 “MOREOVER THOU SHALT PROVIDE OUT OF ALL THE PEOPLE ABLE MEN, SUCH AS FEAR GOD, MEN OF TRUTH, HATING COVETOUSNESS; AND PLACE **such** OVER THEM, **to be** RULERS OF THOUSANDS, **and** RULERS OF HUNDREDS, RULERS OF FIFTIES, AND RULERS OF TENS:”

Here we have a picture of those men within the numbers of his chosen people that God desires to have as leaders. Compare them to the teaching of the New Testament concerning the qualifications of elders and we can see even clearer that God does not change. Nor does He change what he expects of mankind. First of all “ABLE MEN”; “ONE THAT RULETH HIS OWN HOUSE WELL”, (**I Timothy 3:4**); “NOT A NOVICE” (**I Timothy 3:6**); “SUCH AS FEAR GOD”, BLAMELESS,...VILIGANT, SOBER OF GOOD BEHAVIOR” (**I Timothy 3:2**), “HONEST REPORT, FULL OF THE HOLY GHOST AND WISDOM” (**Acts 6:3**); “MEN OF TRUTH”, “APT TO TEACH”, (**I Timothy 3:2**), “HOLDING FAST THE FAITHFUL WORD” (**Titus 1:9**); “HATING COVETOUSNESS”, “NOT GIVEN TO FILTHY LUCRE” (**Titus 1:7**), “NOT COVETOUS” (**I Timothy 3:3**).

Then Moses is to set these men over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. This pattern of oversight is still the most common sense way to approach managing men today. We can readily see the parallel in our own military with the commanders of battalions, companies, platoons and squads. The base numbers differ somewhat but the basic structure is very much like what Jethro suggests.

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v.22 “AND LET THEM JUDGE THE PEOPLE AT ALL SEASONS: AND IT SHALL BE, *that* EVERY GREAT MATTER THEY SHALL BRING UNTO THEE, BUT EVERY SMALL MATTER THEY SHALL JUDGE: SO SHALL IT BE EASIER FOR THYSELF, AND THEY SHALL BEAR *the burden* WITH THEE.”

Let each leader judge his own people at each level. Those at the lower level handle the trivial things, pass up to the next level those things that they can't handle, etc. until only “EVERY GREAT MATTER”; problems and things that need the intervention or assistance of God would come to Moses.

v.23 “IF THOU SHALT DO THIS THING, AND GOD COMMAND THEE *so*, THEN THOU SHALT BE ABLE TO ENDURE, AND ALL THIS PEOPLE SHALL ALSO GO TO THEIR PLACE IN PEACE.”

Jethro even suggests that Moses bring his suggestions before God giving God the opportunity to approve them and give the appropriate commandments. Then Moses would be able to handle the job that God has given him and the people would be able to get the judgment and support that they need.

v.24 “SO MOSES HEARKENED TO THE VOICE OF HIS FATHER IN LAW, AND DID ALL THAT HE HAD SAID.”

v.25 “AND MOSES CHOSE ABLE MEN OUT OF ALL ISRAEL, AND MADE THEM HEADS OVER THE PEOPLE, RULERS OF THOUSANDS, RULERS OF HUNDREDS, RULERS OF FIFTIES, AND RULERS OF TENS.”

Moses did as Jethro suggested; even down to the numbers of those to be overseen or governed at each level in the government structure.

v.26 “AND THEY JUDGED THE PEOPLE AT ALL SEASONS: THE HARD CAUSES THEY BROUGHT UNTO MOSES, BUT EVERY SMALL MATTER THEY JUDGED THEMSELVES.”

So Moses and God became much like our Supreme Courts today. Only the hard cases, the most complex and important cases came before Moses. All other matters were handled in what we would call the “lower courts”.

v.27 “AND MOSES LET HIS FATHER IN LAW DEPART; AND HE WENT HIS WAY INTO HIS OWN LAND.”

Depending on who's chronology you might follow, Israel is still at the mountain of God, or even still at Rephidim, near the mount of Horeb. Jethro leaves and travels to his own land. See Maps.