

Exodus
June 24, 2007
Chapter 18

I. Reunion

Ex 18:1-6

18:1 Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.

2 After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her **3** and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have become an alien in a foreign land"; **4** and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, "My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh."

5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' sons and wife, came to him in the desert, where he was camped near the mountain of God. **6** Jethro had sent word to him, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons."

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In the last chapter, we saw that Moses needed help, both physically and spiritually. In this chapter, he will get some.

Verse 1 Things that Jethro does in this chapter are:

1. Caretaker of Moses' wife and two sons
2. Glad recipient of the report of LORD's deliverance of Israel
3. Confessor of the LORD's supremacy among gods.
4. Sacerdotal leader of all present, even Moses and Aaron
5. Moses' counselor concerning the application of the LORD's law to the Israel

Verse 1 Since the Israelites have been camped more than traveling and not traveling in a single direction, caravans and other travelers would likely have communicated what has happened in Egypt. From such a report, Jethro might also have heard where he could contact his son-in-law

Verse 2 Although we are not told when Moses sent Zipporah back to Jethro, it was probably immediately after the circumcision of the son at the end of Chapter 4.

Verse 6 Zipporah is not mentioned by name, nor referred to after this verse. Did she die? Was she the Cushite wife of Num. 12:1?

II. The Greatness of the LORD

Ex 18:7-12

7 So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent. 8 Moses told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the LORD had saved them. 9 Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. 10 He said, "Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." 12 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

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Verse 7 As head of state of Israel, Moses could have waited until his father-in-law is brought officially into his presence. Instead, he goes out to meet him.

Verse 8 From this point, Jethro refers to God as the LORD. Before it was only God. The LORD has referred to Himself, as in "I am the LORD." In chapter 3, maybe Jethro is simply learning about that.

Verse 11 In a sense, Jethro's statement recognizes and verifies the obvious, that the LORD is greater than all the other gods, now demonstrated by what He did in Egypt. This statement should not be considered as beginning belief in the LORD; notice God's statement in Gen 22:12:

12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." NIV

Verse 12 Jethro appears to be the lead priest in these festivities. Interestingly, Aaron the yet-to-be-announced High Priest of Israel is there. Perhaps, he, too, is learning from Jethro.

III. The Problem

Ex 18:13-16

him from morning till evening. 14 When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?" 15 Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. 16 Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws."

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Verse 13 Apparently Moses had been serving as judge personally for all two million Israelites traveling with him. While the amount of

this work was probably always quite bad, Moses' absence to greet and talk with his father-in-law, wife, and sons probably caused it to backlog worse than usual.

Verse 14 Until this point, we see that Moses has been holding up a huge burden. In 17:1-7, we see some of the pressure on him. In the rest of Chapter 17, we see that others help him. Now an additional expansion of authority to others is needed to relieve Moses of that huge burden that he has been carrying.

Verse 16 The Jewish covenant laws had not yet been given through Moses, but that did not mean that they had no laws or decrees from God. Perhaps they had an earlier version; we do not know, but apparently they had something.

IV. The Solution

Ex 18:17-23

17 Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. 18 You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. 19 Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. 20 Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. 21 But select capable men from all the people — men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain — and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 22 Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. 23 If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

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Verse 20 If they learn how to live, then he will not need to judge. They can make their own better decisions, and others can also judge besides Moses.

Verse 21 Jethro tells how to organize—creating a trustworthy judicial system. Organization is important to the Christian, even though there is always a tension between organization and being available to following God's will.

Verse 22 What is the load that the Christian is expected to share? To carry by oneself?

Gal 6:2-5

2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, 5 for each one should carry his own load.

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Verse 23 Jethro offers an additional bit of wise advice by noting that his suggestions will not work unless God is behind it.

V. Following the Advice

Ex 18:24-27

24 Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. **25** He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. **26** They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

27 Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

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Verse 24 There are several important lessons in Moses listening to Jethro. Even though, he was the supreme leader, he took advice. He learned from others and upgraded his process. He does not appear to be defensive. His organization and ability to offer sacrifices were upgraded.

Verse 24 According to Deut. 1:19ff, Moses did not choose the judges until after the law was given. Before doing this, Moses would want the procedure to be approved by God.

Verse 26 Moses becomes the court of last appeal.

Verse 27 Jethro might have left before the law was given. Verses 24-26 show the completion of the thoughts associated with the earlier part of the chapter.

VI. Learning for Us

What can we learn from this chapter? Are we listening to others who offer advice to us? Do we learn from our troubles, or just repeat them?

How did you react the last time that you were corrected?

When do we decide to delegate, and when do we decide to do? Oftentimes, we just do and do not think about this question.

If the new leaders under Moses fail, how would he feel about that? Should he avoid doing what Jethro says for fear that this might happen? What precautions should he take to keep the failure from happening? Giving the law, training of judges, and Moses continuing as last resort, should the Israelites do anything more to make this work?