

Jethro Counsels Moses

Exodus 18

Exodus 18 - *“And Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses’ father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people—that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt. ² Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses’ wife, after he had sent her back, ³ with her two sons, of whom the name of one was Gershom (for he said, “I have been a stranger in a foreign land”) ⁴ and the name of the other was Eliezer (for he said, “The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh”); ⁵ and Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God. ⁶ Now he had said to Moses, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her.”*

⁷ So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down, and kissed him. And they asked each other about their well-being, and they went into the tent. ⁸ And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardship that had come upon them on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. ⁹ Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the Lord had done for Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. ¹⁰ And Jethro said, “Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, and who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹ Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them.” ¹² Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God. And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God.

¹³ And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. ¹⁴ So when Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, “What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?” ¹⁵ And Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶ When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws.” ¹⁷ So Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “The thing that you do is not good. ¹⁸ Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. ¹⁹ Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. ²⁰ And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. ²¹ Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. ²² And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. ²³ If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.”

²⁴ So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. 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. ²⁶ So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves. ²⁷ Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land."

Background Notes

Exodus 17 gives the account of God's miraculous provision of water from the rock for His people, and the defeat of the Amalekites who had attacked them. All this took place in the general vicinity of Mount Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai. This important mountain was also called the "mountain of God" (v5).

In Exodus 18, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought Moses' family from Midian to be reunited with him. It appears that Moses' wife Zipporah had returned to Midian after their controversy over the circumcision of their sons (Exodus 4). Moses may have sent his family back to Midian for protection as well. At that time God's people were still slaves under bondage in Egypt, and Moses was going back to Egypt to confront the Pharaoh, so it might have been dangerous for his family to be in Egypt.

In the reunion of Moses and his family, some Bible commentators have seen a prophetic picture of the coming kingdom of Christ on this earth. In this prophetic picture, Moses represents our Lord as the rightful Leader of his people. The children of Israel, of course, represent restored Israel. They have been delivered from Egypt, which represents this world of anti-Semitic bondage, and they are now joined to Moses their deliverer. In this prophetic picture, Jethro, the Gentile, represents the saved Gentiles of the Kingdom period. They will rejoice, as Jethro did, in all the wonderful works of God. And finally, Zipporah, Moses' Gentile wife, represents the Church, the Bride of Christ, now present with Christ in His Kingdom here on this earth. This is a possible prophetic picture in Exodus 18.

Some commentators also extend the picture to the second half of the chapter, when Moses delegated his authority by appointing judges to assist in the civil government of Israel. In the same way, in our Lord's coming kingdom on this earth there will be civil government. Believers will reign with Christ and we will be given delegated authority in His glorious kingdom. I Corinthians 6:2 says, *"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?"* Daniel 7 also discusses our Lord's coming Kingdom on this earth, in which He will delegate His authority to the saints who will reign with Him in this great kingdom. Daniel 7:22 – *"...the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom."* And verse 27: *"Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High..."* So, we may have a spiritual prophetic picture of our Lord's coming Kingdom on this earth in Exodus 18.

Doctrinal Points

1. God provides His people with proof to remove doubt.

Moses told Jethro all that the Lord had done to deliver His people from Pharaoh and the bondage in Egypt, and how the Lord had met their needs along the way. *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. 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. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for He did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly' (v9-11).*

Exodus 2 states that Jethro was a priest. We don't believe that Jethro was a pagan priest. No, we believe that Jethro was a priest of the one true God, similar to Melchizedek in Genesis 14. So here in Exodus 18:11, the point is not that Jethro is now finally becoming a convert to the God of Israel. No, this is rather confirmation of Jethro's faith in the one true God. It may be that Jethro had some doubts along the way, but these doubts were cleared away after seeing all the evidence of the hand of God at work on behalf of His people.

As a believer, did you ever have any doubts about the Christian faith? I think each one of us has had some doubts along the way. Well, God provides proof to remove these doubts. For years I've taught a course called *Christian Evidences*. You can find it on our website. Christian Evidences covers a lot of the objective evidence that's available to show the credibility of the Christian faith. Over the years I've found that all this evidence – and there's **a lot** of it! – is more beneficial in confirming Christians **in** their faith than in convincing skeptics **of** the Christian faith. Why? It's because a skeptic "convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still." It's a matter of the will. So, lots of evidence does not necessarily convince the skeptic.

Believers like Jethro, however, are confirmed in their faith and have their doubts removed when they see the evidence -- and they rejoice in the wonderful works of God! God provides His people with proof to remove doubt.

2. God Provides His People with Help to Avoid Burn Out

When Jethro saw the workload that Moses was carrying, he was concerned about his son-in-law's health and well-being. "Moses, you'll burn out! You can't continue to carry this heavy workload. You need some help! Moses, you should continue to teach the people the ways of God and handle the major disputes, but delegate some of your authority to good men who can help you govern the people. Appoint men of high character to judge the minor disputes." Moses listened to his father-in-law Jethro, and he took his advice (v24). Moses delegated some of his authority, and he appointed judges over groups of thousands, groups of hundreds, groups of fifties and groups of tens (v25).

Some Christians have found fault with Moses for taking Jethro's advice. They say that if Moses had depended on the Lord, he would have had the strength to do the job himself, without risking burnout or needing additional help. I don't see it that way. I believe Jethro was an answer to prayer! He was sent by the Lord to give Moses some good advice.

Certainly there's some teaching for us here. Did you ever face burnout in serving the Lord? Do you feel overworked and overwhelmed in doing what you believe the Lord has called you to do? I'm not talking about shouldering a too-heavy workload because you want to make more money, and buy bigger and better stuff! I'm speaking here about being stretched to the limit and facing burnout because you're doing what God has called you to do – as a parent in a Christian family, or as a servant in a Christian ministry or church fellowship.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, learn the lesson of this doctrinal point. Be willing to take good advice from people who care about you -- even your relatives! Be willing to delegate some of your authority. Look around you, and open your eyes. The help you need may be closer than you realize. God provides His people with help to avoid burnout.

Practical Application

Share the good news of what God is doing with your relatives!

After Moses and Jethro exchanged pleasantries (v7), Moses told his father-in-law the good news of what God was doing. And Jethro rejoiced!

Getting along with relatives is not always easy – especially when you get together at Thanksgiving or Christmas, or on family vacations. Even Christian relatives have been known to disagree, squabble, criticize and complain when they get together!

Here's some good practical advice from Exodus 18 on how to avoid hostilities and criticism with both Christian and non-Christian relatives. Focus your conversations on the positive! Relate what God is doing in your life. Share the good news of what God is doing with your relatives.