

## **Exodus 18**

### **Salvation Through God and Counsel in the Mission**

Pg. 78 in scripture notebook

In Exodus 18 we can be reminded that we, like Moses, have a message of how God is mighty to save!

Like Moses we have a Great Commission. For us it is to share that message with all and teach them to obey all that God has commanded.

And like Moses we need counsel and we need to know the voice, the word of God, well enough to hold all that counsel to it!

#### **Exodus 18:1**

**18** Moses's father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, heard about everything that God had done for Moses and for God's people Israel when the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt.

We see that word had already been spreading across the region of all that the God of Israel had done. I can only imagine that Jethro, Moses Father in law, had been asking every merchant and traveler from Egypt for news about Moses and freeing the people of Israel.

I have to wonder what all had been recounted to him at this time? I would imagine that it would have sounded like some of the most fantastic stories!

Jethro: "Have you heard of a man by the name of Moses and has anything been happening in Egypt?"

Merchant: "Have I heard of Moses?! Everyone has heard of Moses and the God of Israel! Signs and wonders like I could have never dreamed of have happened! Because at first Pharaoh would not let the people of Israel go. Their God turned the Nile, the greatest of rivers, it was turned to blood! Giant balls of ice fell in the desert and destroyed the Crops! Darkness covered the Land! Finally the first born of every family died, except those of the people of Israel! All this happened because Pharaoh

tried to resist the God of Israel! Finally, Pharaoh relented to the God of Israel and let them go!”

What news to receive after seeing your son in law leave to confront the most powerful nation in the world at the time!

## **Exodus 18:2-5**

**2** Now Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, had taken in Zipporah, Moses’s wife, after he had sent her back, **3** along with her two sons, one of whom was named Gershom (because Moses had said, “I have been a resident alien in a foreign land”) **4** and the other Eliezer (because he had said, “The God of my father was my helper and rescued me from Pharaoh’s sword”).

**5** Moses’s father-in-law, Jethro, along with Moses’s wife and sons, came to him in the wilderness where he was camped at the mountain of God. **6** He sent word to Moses, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons.”

We don’t know when or why Moses’s wife and two sons were sent back to her family. Some theologians have theorized that it was because Moses divorced wife. Some theologians think that it could have been during his time in Egypt to keep them safe. And some think that it could have been after they had freed the people from Egypt and as they neared where his father in law lived Moses may have sent his wife and son’s ahead to bring him the good news of all that God had done.

Although we don’t know for sure I am more persuaded by those who think that Moses sent them under happier circumstances as when Jethro sends word that he is coming with Moses' wife and son’s it seems to be that he is bringing a blessing to Moses.

It seems significant that we are told the meaning of the names of Moses sons: “One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, ‘I have become an alien in a foreign land’; and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, ‘My father’s God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh’ ”. When Moses named his sons, he was telling the story of his life. Gershom sounds like the Hebrew for “stranger there.” The name expresses the alienation Moses felt after first leaving the land of his birth. He had killed an Egyptian; so he became a fugitive from Pharaoh’s justice, finally ending up as a stranger in Midian (Exod. 2:11–15). But he named his second son Eliezer, which means “God is my helper.” Eventually Moses came to realize that his exile was also his salvation. God had delivered him from death by enabling him to escape from Egypt. Which is why he gave

his younger son a name that would serve as a living testimony of his faith in the God of Israel.

Together the names Gershom and Eliezer told the story of Moses' life: "I was a stranger there, but God is my helper." These two names also described what was happening to the nation of Israel. It is interesting that like Moses, the Israelites were strangers in Egypt. But God was their helper; he saved them from Pharaoh's sword.

### **Exodus 18:7-12**

**7** So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down, and then kissed him. They asked each other how they had been and went into the tent. **8** Moses recounted to his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardships that confronted them on the way, and how the LORD rescued them.

**9** Jethro rejoiced over all the good things the LORD had done for Israel when he rescued them from the power of the Egyptians. **10** "Blessed be the LORD," Jethro exclaimed, "who rescued you from the power of Egypt and from the power of Pharaoh. He has rescued the people from under the power of Egypt! **11** Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because he did wonders when the Egyptians acted arrogantly against Israel."

**12** Then Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses's father-in-law in God's presence.

The rest of this interaction is focused on Moses and his father in law, Jethro. It is important to note what we know of Jethro. He of course is Moses' father in law but we are told that he is a priest of Median. We are not told of which God he serves as a priest. Given the timeline it is entirely possible, if not probable, that Jethro was a priest of one of the false Gods of Midan and not a priest of the one true God, Yahweh.

But even if Jethro was priest of the God of Israel, Yahweh, what we see in these verses is a beautiful moment of evangelism and genuine response of belief!

Moses recounts all that God had done to rescue them. Not just the miracles but the hardships. How God had sent mighty plagues proving that he was more powerful than the Gods of the most powerful nation. How God seemed to lead them into the worst tactical position with their backs against the red sea. Because God's plan was to part the red sea and crush the army of Egypt. How Israel complained for food and God

rained bread from heaven. How God led them to a place where the only water was bitter but then God made it clean. How God, Yahweh, the one true God, WAS MIGHTY TO SAVE!

How did Jethro respond to these astounding accounts from Moses?

### **He Believed!**

**9** Jethro rejoiced over all the good things the LORD had done for Israel when he rescued them from the power of the Egyptians. **10** “Blessed be the LORD,” Jethro exclaimed, “who rescued you from the power of Egypt and from the power of Pharaoh. He has rescued the people from under the power of Egypt! **11** Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because he did wonders when the Egyptians acted arrogantly against Israel.”

In Jethro’s response of true belief we see a stark contrast to Israel’s consistent unbelief.

And we see that Jethro’s first act of belief was repentance.

Douglas K. Stuart

How would someone show that he had converted to faith in Yahweh? (1) He would begin to worship Yahweh according to his best understanding of how that was to be done, and (2) he would eat a covenant meal with other worshipers of Yahweh in the presence of Yahweh. The Israelites had not yet received Yahweh’s covenant with them as a people, so neither Jethro nor the Israelites yet understood all the exact ways to obey Yahweh and had to demonstrate conversion as well as they could. They all knew something about sacrificing as the heart of obedient worship since that concept had “trickled down” into the consciousness of peoples all over the earth from the days of the first family, who understood the basic concept of sacrifice: “something else must die so that I may live.”

A “burnt offering” was understood to atone for past sins and to appeal for forgiveness and acceptance. “Other sacrifices” were offered by Jethro to be sure to cover for any inadequacies in approaching such a powerful and, indeed, omnipotent God as Yahweh was, to ensure that Jethro would be accepted in genuine fellowship with God himself.<sup>252</sup> Then “Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law in the presence of God,” which signified the formal admission of Jethro into Israel. The religious leader of the nation, Aaron, and all the other leaders (“the elders”) had a meal with him “in the presence of God,” which can only mean before the altar that at that point most symbolized God’s presence, that is, that altar that Moses had publicly built at Rephidim/Sinai (17:15–16)—inasmuch as the tabernacle/tent of meeting had not yet been constructed.

Douglas K. Stuart, [\*Exodus\*](#), vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 413.

Moses had a wonderful story of salvation to tell.

As Christians we have a similar story to tell because our salvation is also based on what God has done through human history. The story starts with our bondage to sin. Our entire race sinned in Adam, Just as Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” and thus we have always been enslaved to sin. But after long centuries of captivity God sent a Savior to deliver us. It was his Son Jesus who saved us through his death on the cross and resurrection from the grave. The Bible says that God the Son became a man “so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death” (Heb. 2:14b, 15). This was our Red Sea crossing. The crucifixion—and with it, the resurrection—brought us from death to life, from bondage to freedom. But that is not the end of the story. In a way, it is only the beginning. Now, we are living for Christ, following him through the wasteland. As we walk this pilgrim road, we have a story to tell about how, in spite of our ongoing rebellion, God provides for us and delivers us from all our enemies and we await our promised land where we will be with God forever!

God has given us a message to proclaim as well. It is the message of salvation in Christ: forgiveness through his cross and eternal life through his empty tomb.

Similar to Moses we have also been given a great commission. For Moses it came through God appearing in a burning bush and for us it came through God the Son, resurrected Jesus, where he gathered his faithful 11 and gave us this commission.

#### **Matthew 28:18-20**

**18** Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. **19** Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Each of us is called to do whatever we can to spread the word, so that all nations will come to worship God.

## **Exodus 18:13-27**

**13** The next day Moses sat down to judge the people, and they stood around Moses from morning until evening. **14** When Moses's father-in-law saw everything he was doing for them he asked, "What is this you're doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?"

**15** Moses replied to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. **16** Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach them God's statutes and laws."

**17** "What you're doing is not good," Moses's father-in-law said to him. **18** "You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can't do it alone. **19** Now listen to me; I will give you some advice, and God be with you. You be the one to represent the people before God and bring their cases to him. **20** Instruct them about the statutes and laws, and teach them the way to live and what they must do. **21** But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating dishonest profit. Place them over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. **22** They should judge the people at all times. Then they can bring you every major case but judge every minor case themselves. In this way you will lighten your load, and they will bear it with you. **23** If you do this, and God so directs you, you will be able to endure, and also all these people will be able to go home satisfied."

**24** Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. **25** So Moses chose able men from all Israel and made them leaders over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. **26** They judged the people at all times; they would bring the hard cases to Moses, but they would judge every minor case themselves.

**27** Moses let his father-in-law go, and he journeyed to his own land.

Jethro saw that the way things were going was not good for either Moses or for the people. His own experience as a Midianite leader may have involved him in regular judging among the Midianites, and it was obvious to him that Moses had overcommitted his time to his judicial role. Nothing was wrong with Moses' serving as a judge; indeed it was clearly an obligation of his as leader of the people. What was wrong was his serving as the *only* judge, without any help, for simple cases as well as for complex ones ("Why do you alone sit as judge?"). In trying to do all the judging himself, Moses may not have been acting foolishly or overconfidently. He may simply have been waiting for God to reveal to Israel a proper, hierarchical judicial system and not trying to make

one up on his own authority. However the most important reason for Moses' going it alone was that he functioned as a prophet, who dispensed God's revelation.

So, Moses was not merely a judge. He was a prophet who conveyed God's will when it was sought. That was almost certainly the reason Moses had felt obligated to do all the judging himself:

So Jethro started by acknowledging and preserving the role of the prophet. He said to Moses: "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. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform" (Exod. 18:19, 20). Jethro was not trying to take his son-in-law away from his calling. Moses would still serve in the role God gave him as the prophet. He would continue to serve as the covenant mediator, standing between God and his people as Israel's representative. He would still teach God's law for daily life. He would show the people how "to live" (literally, "the way to walk"). By the exposition of God's word and by the example of his own life, Moses would continue to lead the Israelites on their pilgrimage. None of that would change.

But Jethro also realized that Moses needed some help; so he presented a plan for governing Israel by the rule of elders.

Jethro's plan was a good one. It called for the selection of wise spiritual leaders who would help Moses govern the people. These men would answer everyday spiritual questions and adjudicate routine personal disputes. But whenever the elders needed help, they would consult with Moses, who would handle all the tough cases. This would preserve his prophetic authority, while at the same time giving him the help he needed to shepherd God's flock.

But the most shocking thing about Jethro's council isn't that it was such a good council, it was that this needed council came to Moses through Jethro.

Moses as prophet had a literal direct line to God. Talked with God.

Then why did God use Jethro instead of just telling him how to govern better himself?

It was because God in this moment was showing the powerful truth of common grace wisdom. That is even though the world is under the curse of sin God has given humans as His image bearers by his grace to still find wisdom sometimes.

There is also a seed planted here that we need counsel. This is taught to us more explicitly in a book of the bible written hundreds of years later. The book of proverbs. The Book of proverbs tells us that there are two paths for people to walk: the path that

leads to life and the path that leads to death. And there are two main characters in the book of proverbs: the Wise man and the fool. The wise man walks on the path that leads to life and the fool walks on the path that leads to death.

Proverbs 11:14

Without guidance, a people will fall,  
but with many counselors there is deliverance.

Proverbs 12:15

A fool's way is right in his own eyes,  
but whoever listens to counsel is wise.

- Why don't we get counsel? Often we are either so proud that we think that we don't need it or we are afraid that we will be told something that we don't want to hear.
- Imagine for a moment if Moses was proud and had ignored the wise counsel that he was given. He and the people would have suffered.

Proverbs 19:20-21

Listen to counsel and accept discipline,  
That you may be wise the rest of your days.  
Many plans are in a man's heart,  
But the counsel of the LORD will stand.

Jethro is right that we need to hold all counsel to the great counsel of God.

**John 14:26** But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.

The primary way for us to hold all get counsel from God and to hold all other counsel up to be tested by God is by the word of God that was

In Exodus 18 we can be reminded that we, like Moses, have a message of how God is mighty to save!

Like Moses we have a Great Commission. For us it is to share that message with all and teach them to obey all that God has commanded.



And like Moses we need counsel and we need to know the voice, the word of God, well enough to hold all that counsel to it!

Each of us is called to do whatever we can to spread the word, so that all nations will come to worship God. We will keep spreading the word and teaching those who respond how to obey it until we are gathered into glory, into our promised land. Then we will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb: (Rev. 15:3a, 4b)

*Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
Lord God Almighty....  
All nations will come  
and worship before you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.*

Let's Pray.