

Imagine having been in Moses' sandals those last three months. What an amazing adventure! He'd met the burning bush, tried to get out of the mission but God won't let him. His brother met him and together you encounter Pharaoh. God humiliates the imaginary Egyptian gods, one by one. The nation experienced the first Passover, walked through the sea, and saw their enemy drown. Then they experienced the tests, the thirst, the craving of food, and the last experience was the defeat of the Amalekites where God showed Himself to be JHWH Nissi, the Lord our Signal Pole. (Exodus 17:15)

Commented [Paul Wall1]: Exodus 17:15 (ESV)
15 And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD is my banner,

Just as God had promised, Moses has returned to Sinai. Remember that when Moses needed some reassurance, God told him he would know it was all of God when he returned and served God on this mountain. (Exodus 3:12) Well, here he is back at the mountain, only now there is a lake at the base of the mountain and a new nation. The God that meets people at this mountain had proved Himself to be their source of living water. (1Corinthians 10:4)

Commented [Paul Wall2]: Exodus 3:12 (ESV)
12 He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

There was obviously a word of mouth passing of news in Midian. Remember when Jethro's daughters saw Moses the first time, they knew he was Egyptian. (Exodus 2:19) They knew what an Egyptian dressed like, so they must have had periodic encounters with that culture which would naturally result in the exchange of news. Part of this probably came about through trade. Jethro had *"heard all that God had done for Moses and Israel"*.

Commented [Paul Wall3]: 1 Corinthians 10:4 (ESV)
4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

Commented [Paul Wall4]: Exodus 2:19 (ESV)
19 They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock."

Moses had gone to seek leave of Jethro after God had given Moses his assignment. (Exodus 4:18) It is very possible that Moses planned to send Zipporah, his wife, and their two sons back to Jethro at the border of Egypt, and arranged for Jethro to meet them at Sinai when he returned.

Commented [Paul Wall5]: Exodus 4:18 (ESV)
18 Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

Some people have argued that Moses had divorced Zipporah because of the phrase in verse 2, "sent her back" *shilluhim*. For every argument to support the idea of divorce there is a counter argument. I do not believe the evidence is strong enough to seriously consider that to be the case. The next verse calls her his wife.

⁵ *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.* The mountain was called the mountain of God when Moses first took Jethro's flocks there. We have archeological evidence that the region worshiped YHWH and also the fact that they descended from Abraham. (Genesis 25:4) Their knowledge of God was limited. It must have been a great encouragement to Jethro to hear the news of Moses' adventure, and to have the confirmation that it had all come to pass as the God of their fathers' had foretold.

Commented [Paul Wall6]: Genesis 25:4 (ESV)
4 The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.

Jethro sent word that he was coming and bringing Moses' wife and two sons. ⁷ *Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent.* Does it strike you as strange that after two months of being away from his wife and sons that he would run to greet his father-in-law with a kiss? I can just hear a modern day woman say, "Hey what am I, chopped liver?"

Moses must have been very close to his father-in-law. A great leader would wait in their tent and expect the other party to bow to them, but Moses was a meek man who knew he had little to do with the great things that had occurred. Culturally it is hard for us to relate, but remember Moses has been on a spiritual journey that was probably started by Jethro sending him to the mountain of God. Now **Moses has passed up Jethro spiritually** and knows that YHWH is more than a tribal deity.

They went into the tent to talk over all that God had done and what Moses had learned about YHWH since they've been apart. It should always be a joy to us when someone we mentor passes us up spiritually and ministers to us. Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:2) became Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:43) as the ministry of Paul surpassed that of Barnabas.

Imagine the joy of going over those momentous events, that roller coaster ride of highs and lows. But more than the wonder of any particular miracle was the revelation that YHWH was so great that the Egyptian gods were proved to be worthless. This had little to do with Moses or the people. If anything, Moses may have pointed out his doubts, reluctance to obey, and disappointments in the way God led him. **It was all about a gracious and loving God that keeps His promises and has an end in mind that is greater than we could imagine.** The increasing revelation of YHWH struck a chord in Jethro's heart. The revelation of God's word through Moses had been confirmed in the plagues and the tests.

¹⁰ *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 has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.* Jethro praised God for all the good He had done for Israel, for their deliverance from captivity and the defeat of Pharaoh. His heart must have been overwhelmed with the assurance that YHWH is indeed Creator God. In fact, the next verses indicate that this is a conversion experience for the priest of Midian, Jethro.

¹¹ *Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.*" It sounds as if he was not sure before. Though he probably worshiped YHWH, he had no evidence that the God of that mountain was any greater than the gods of the nations. Now he has more than enough evidence. If he doubted Moses' encounter with YHWH before, he doesn't doubt it now. The impossible has happened. Everything YHWH predicted has come to

Commented [Paul Wall7]: Acts 13:1-2 (ESV)
1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
Commented [Paul Wall8]: Acts 13:43 (ESV)
43 And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

pass in a greater way than they could possibly have imagined. The arrogant gods of Egypt couldn't stop JHWH.

Do you know that YHWH is greater than all gods, than wealth, than power, than fame, than anything the world has to offer? Is there anything worth pursuing that even comes close to God?

I think sometimes we are where Jethro was, wondering if all these promises will really come to pass. We might think Christianity is just another religion. Then God proves Himself to be incomparably great in some way that connects with our heart, and we believe. We realize He is the only thing worth pursuing. The proof is all around us if our eyes are willing to see. (Isaiah 6:3)

Once we believe, we must act on our faith and seal our conviction. ¹² *And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.* A burnt offering is the complete consummation of an animal by fire. (Leviticus 1:9) It implies the complete dedication of the life with nothing held back. Jethro also brought additional sacrifices, portions of which may have been shared with Moses over the fellowship meal. He was a believer.

It's pretty amazing when a priest can humble himself and receive what his former disciple brings as a more complete revelation. Jethro believes, and he has acted in solemn ceremony sealing that conviction. Sacrificial worship went all the way back to the sons of Adam. (Genesis 4:4) Jethro knew about God but the text leads me to believe that this was when he came to know God personally.

The passage says they ate before God. This might mean they ate before the altar but I think it meant they ate before the pillar of cloud. Jethro had to be moved by that manifest presence of God.

Eating together in the ancient world implied friendship and peace with those at the table. To eat before God implies to be at peace with God. (Exodus 24:11) Though Jethro may not have fully understood it, that sacrifice looked forward to God's provision. That is the only way man can be at peace with God, the sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of God. (Romans 5:1)

What a joyous reunion that was! But the next day it was back to work for Moses. The people were just getting use to being free. As slaves, they really had no rights. Now they were a free people with their own property. They were also a new nation. They had to know how to deal with the many situations that arose among them. Do you have a right to buy back something you sold for the same price? What if someone is watching your animals and one is stolen? Are they liable? What kind of restitution do you deserve if someone knocks out one of your teeth? There were all kinds of questions about actual disputes.

Commented [Paul Wall9]: Isaiah 6:3 (ESV)
3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

Commented [Paul Wall10]: Leviticus 1:9 (ESV)
9 but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

Commented [Paul Wall11]: Leviticus 1:9 (ESV)
9 but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

Commented [Paul Wall12]: Exodus 24:11 (ESV)
11 And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

Commented [Paul Wall13]: Romans 5:1 (ESV)
1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

13 The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. The judge sits while the plaintiff and defendant stand, even as it is today. As their leader and prophet, Moses had to ask God for the rules for this new nation. Jethro watched a full day of this and asked Moses why he operated that way.

15 And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God;" NIV translates it that they come to seek God's will. Moses was their priest. He heard from God. So Moses explained to Jethro that he had to get the laws for the new nation from God. Each situation required that he find out the rule to establish a standard. Moses was creating the first genuine theocracy. The law of God was to rule and God was the final judge. The laws and the religion were one. The king and the prophet were one.

Some people want a theocracy today. That won't happen until Jesus returns. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36) We cannot legislate righteousness. In a democracy, we can vote for godly principles; we can even encourage the Christian faith, but we will never be a theocracy. That is the real reason for separation of church and state. We need freedom of religion not freedom from religion. Even Israel will later have a king and a high priest. The man that tried to do both was stricken by God. (2Chronicles 26:19) Any nation that claims to be one is dangerous because man is at the head claiming the authority that belongs to God. This is what Islam would like to force upon the world.

17 Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. 18 You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. After Jethro's conversion and now a day of observation, he had some advice for Moses. "You can't do it alone." One commentator writes that this is the world's wisdom interjected upon the new nation and that it resulted in the Sanhedrin that killed Jesus. At the same time the author claims that Jethro was converted.

Is there room for common sense in the Kingdom of God? Of course there is! But it isn't so common, and the Holy Spirit can at anytime override it with the uncommon. The converted soul will find it more and more common to them. Jethro could see Moses was trying to do too much and it was frustrating for the people.

Sometimes leaders like to be the go to person. They like the attention and the feeling of importance, of being indispensable, but God is the only indispensable One. Had Moses' asked for a solution? If so, perhaps Jethro's advice was the answer. **God's will is usually what is best for you and for everyone involved.** Moses was working himself to death and the people were tired of waiting. It was too heavy a burden, and he needed help.

Commented [Paul Wall14]: John 18:36 (ESV)
36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."

Commented [Paul Wall15]: 2 Chronicles 26:19 (ESV)
19 Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar of incense.

19 Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, 20 and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. Jethro wasn't asking Moses to deny his calling. He was still to hear from God and warn the people of how they must live to please God. But he didn't need to deal with every single little issue or ones that already had a precedent that they could follow.

21 Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. This is a figurative way to say that there needed to be a judicial hierarchy, not literally a judge for every ten people. I imagine in most cases the elders became the judges. They would memorize laws that had been given by God to Moses. They were to be men who had the fear of God and hated bribes. It is the basis for our Western judicial system today! (Deuteronomy 1:15-17)

If the case was appealed or the judge could not make a decision, the case worked its way up the ladder until it reached Moses. He was the Supreme Court. He took the matters to God. He would go to the Tent of Meeting and present the case before the LORD. This is where much of the Levitical Law originated. Some people think it came from Moses meeting God on Sinai. That was true for the Ten Commandments and the instructions for the Tabernacle, but the rest came from Moses inquiring about cases before God.

Wouldn't it be great if today the qualification of a judge was that they feared God and hated a bribe? Many of the original American colonies required political candidates to be a believer in Jesus Christ and the Bible to run for office. We have drifted so very far that is difficult to get a judge on the Supreme Court if they do profess a faith in Jesus as Lord.

Leaders need to share the burden of leading. Authority must be delegated to keep any one individual from burning out. *22 And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.* Just as Aaron and Hur had held up Moses' arms during the battle with Amalek, godly men need to come alongside Moses to help in judging the cases that arose in Israel.

The next verse shows us that Jethro expected Moses to check his advice with the LORD. After hearing the testimony to date of Moses' experiences with God, Jethro surely had no doubt that Moses would do that. *23 If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.*" In other words, "God will direct you! You'll see that it is within God's will to share the burden. You'll see that you weren't meant to do it alone.

Commented [Paul Wall16]: 15 So I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men, and appointed them to have authority over you--as commanders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens and as tribal officials. 16 And I charged your judges at that time: Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly, whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an alien. 17 Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God. Bring me any case too hard for you, and I will hear it.

You'll keep from being overworked and breaking down, and the people will get a timely answer." This is the basis for a speedy or timely trial.

Moses followed the advice of his father-in-law and found it was of God. The people chose the men and Moses appointed them to their positions. (Deuteronomy 1:13-15) These were not inherited positions but were appointed on the basis of their integrity. This is very similar to the selection of elders in the church Jesus established, and for the same reason. One man can't do it all. He would burn out and the people would be frustrated. (Galatians 6:2)

Even a new believer can be inspired with a common sense solution to a problem. Nations have followed the Jethro pattern and found it very helpful. If one judge is out of line, the others higher up will see the mistake and correct it. At the top should be those most qualified. All along the ladder should be judges who seek apply the law that should conform to the will of God. This is where we get a nation of laws. At the top, they look to their constitution (or Torah for the Jews) for clues as to the guidelines for their decisions because of the conviction that the constitution was inspired. The whole system goes back to Moses' father-in-law.

While our secular judges are bound by law and precedent that may or may not be inspired, our elders are to look to Scripture and pray to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. (1Peter 5:2-3)

What can chapter 18 teach us today? No matter how anointed we are, we need help. (Ecclesiastes 4:9) This is the reason the church descriptions always consist of a unit with many parts. (1Corinthians 12:12) Moses led Jethro to salvation, but then Jethro led Moses to a practical salvation. Overwork is just as detrimental to us as an individual and a family as laziness can be. Are you trying to do too much? Do you need to delegate something to others? Find that balance that God has for you and you'll be more effective. God is concerned about the physical and practical as well as the spiritual. What a gracious God we serve! How can you help others?

Let's also consider that **the testimony of God at work in our lives can win others to faith**. Bring them into your tent and share the story of what God has done! (Mark 5:19) Maybe you, like Jethro knew of God but you need to recognize He is God of all creation, the only God, and give your whole life to Him, as represented in the burnt offering. Nothing else is worth pursuing with your whole heart!

Questions

- 1 What kind of relationship did Jethro and Moses have?
- 2 What was the first thing they did?
- 3 What converted Jethro?

Commented [Paul Wall17]: Choose some wise, understanding and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you." 14 You answered me, "What you propose to do is good." 15 So I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men, and appointed them to have authority over you--as commanders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens and as tribal officials.

Commented [Paul Wall18]: Galatians 6:2 (ESV)
2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Commented [Paul Wall19]: 1 Peter 5:2-3 (ESV)
2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;
3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

Commented [Paul Wall20]: Ecclesiastes 4:9 (ESV)
9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

Commented [Paul Wall21]: 1 Corinthians 12:12 (ESV)
12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

Commented [Paul Wall22]: Mark 5:19 (ESV)
19 And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

- 4 How did he express His worship?
- 5 What did he observe the next day?
- 6 What was the situation?
- 7 What was Moses explanation?
- 8 What was Jethro's solutions?
- 9 Why might we believe it was of God?
- 10 How is it applied today?
- 11 What's missing today?