EXODUS

Chapter 18

*Jethro Visits Moses*

**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.” 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. 13 The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around 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.” 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.” 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**.

**18:1** *Jethro the priest of Midian.* See note on 2:16….Reuel (see v. 18), which means “friend of God.” His other name, Jethro. (CSB)

**18:2** *sent away his wife.* Apparently Moses sent Zipporah to her father with the news that the Lord had blessed his mission (see v. 1) and that he was in the vicinity of Mount Sinai with Israel. (CSB)

**18:5** *mountain of God.* See 3:1 and note…*Horeb.* Means “desert,” “desolation”; either (1) an alternate name for Mount Sinai or (2) another high mountain in the same vicinity in the southeast region of the Sinai peninsula. Tradition identifies Mount Horeb with Ras es-Safsaf (“willow peak”), 6,500 feet high, and Mount Sinai with Jebel Musa (“mountain of Moses”), 7,400 feet high, but both identifications are uncertain. (CSB)

**18:9** JETHRO WAS DELIGHTED - The elders of Midian did not have Jethro;’s regard for the Lord and saw Israel as a threat. Cf. Num. 22:4-7. (TLSB)

**18:11** *Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods.* See the similar confession of Naaman in 2Ki 5:15. (CSB)

Jethro had not believed in one God, but now he recognized the Lord as supreme. (TLSB)

**18:12** *brought.* The verb means “provided” an animal for sacrifice (see, e.g., 25:2; Lev 12:8), not “officiated at” a sacrifice. (CSB)

*eat bread with.* A token of friendship (contrast the battle with the Amalekites, 17:8–16). Such a meal often climaxed the establishment of a treaty (see Ge 31:54; Ex 24:11). (CSB)

**18:14** ALONE SIT - Moses tried to be judge for the entire nation. (TLSB)

**18:15** *seek God’s will.* Inquire of God, usually by going to a place of worship (see Ge 25:22 and note; Nu 27:21) or to a prophet (see 1Sa 9:9; 1Ki 22:8). (CSB)

To seek resolution of disputes through Moses, their intermediary with God. (TLSB)

**18:16** *God’s decrees and laws.* The process of compiling and systematizing the body of divine law that would govern the newly formed nation of Israel may have already begun (see 15:25–26 and note on Ge 26:5). (CSB)

Rules introduced in chapter 12 and 15:25-26. Decisions were probably made case by case. The practiced of the law and justice was important to the Lord in ordering Israelite society, as the details of the Books of Moses show. The Lord worked through Moses - a judge - to write these first books of Scripture. (TLSB)

**18:19** GOD BE WITH YOU - Jethro advised Moses on how to delegate his workload, but also recognized that God must authorize and direct the process. (TLSB)

**18:20** TEACH THEM - Moses should educate the people and resolved disputes. (TLSB)

**18:21-22** These judges worked administratively under the auspices of Moses. (TLSB)

**18:21** *men who fear God.* See note on Ge 20:11. (CSB)

This would make the men trustworthy and immune to bribes. (TLSB)

**18:23** GOD SO COMMANDS - Jethro’s reorganization did not rule out God’s direction but respect it. (TLSB)

**18:24** MOSES LISTENED - Moses humbly accepted Jethro’s advice. (TLSB)

**18:25 L**EADERS…OFFICIALS - The hierarchy of leadership, based on existing offices, provided Israel with a practical system of government that they had not developed while in Egypt. (TLSB)