

# EXODUS

## Chapter 18

### *Jethro's Advice*

Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. 2 Now Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had taken Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her home, 3 along with her two sons. The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land"), 4 and the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"). 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. 6 And when he sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her," 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. 8 Then 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 in the way, and how the LORD had delivered them. 9 And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians. 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. 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people." 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. 13 The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. 14 When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till 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 dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws." 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. 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. 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. 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. 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." 24 So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. 25 Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. 26 And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. 27 Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.

**18:1** *Jethro the priest of Midian.* Reuel (see v. 18), which means "friend of God." His other name, Jethro. (CSB)

**18:2** *sent her home.* 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)

When and why this happened is unclear. Cf 4:24–26, after which Zipporah is not mentioned until here. (TLSB)

**18:5** *mountain of God. 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)

**18:7** *bowed ... kissed.* Customary greeting of courtesy and respect. (TLSB)

**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. Cf 2Ki 5:15; Jnh 1:16 for similar confessions. (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)

A fellowship meal, marking their shared faith in the Lord. (TLSB)

**18:13** *sat to judge.* As the judge, Moses sat. Litigants and witnesses stood. (TLSB)

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

**18:15** *inquire of God.* Inquire of God, usually by going to a place of worship 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** *statues of God.* The process of compiling and systematizing the body of divine law that would govern the newly formed nation of Israel may have already begun. (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** *make them know* - 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.* This would make the men trustworthy and immune to bribes. (TLSB)

**18:23** *God will direct* - 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** *chose able men* - 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)

**Ch 18** Moses serves as chief mediator between God and the Israelites, and God uses Moses and his subordinates to teach the people about Himself through His Law. God also uses Moses to provide access to Him, since the people come to Moses to seek God's will. This role of Moses foreshadowed Jesus, our mediator with the Father. God has revealed Himself in Jesus for all to see, and through Jesus we may approach God as one of His own children. • Jesus Christ, our mediator, judge and guide us so we may be Your faithful servants who minister in Your name. Amen. (TLSB)