

**18** 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.

<sup>2</sup>After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her <sup>3</sup>and her two sons. One son was named Gershom,<sup>[a]</sup> for Moses said, "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land"; <sup>4</sup>and the other was named Eliezer,<sup>[b]</sup> for he said, "My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh."

<sup>5</sup>Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' sons and wife, came to him in the wilderness, where he was camped near the mountain of God. <sup>6</sup>Jethro had sent word to him, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons."

<sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>He said,

Hearing about God's works and hearing about what he has done causes Jethro (his highness) to become inquisitive about the story.

First is the hearing - what do you do with that?

caveat\_

Moses may have sent Zipporah and his sons away after the Exodus, the last thing we have heard about them is when Zipporah has to circumcise her son in order to rescue Moses from death. Commentators explain that circumcision wouldn't have been a custom that would have been agreeable to her and so Moses may have taken his time to perform the rite, he then became ill and was unable to perform it, so Zipporah had to do it. This may have resulted in a little tension in the family. As Zipporah is originally from the area nearby it is easier for her to go home to her father than trudge around in the desert, Moses may have sent her and her sons back to Jethro to live— Moses had an important mission and they may have hindered this purpose.

Jethro's interest in God has been stirred to the point of needing to come and find out the truth of the story for himself.

Moses gives Jethro a full account of what has happened – the evidence of his work with God is there before him, hundreds of thousand of people that have walked free from slavery. And the story of the plagues and what God has done cannot be dismissed. There's the story and there's the evidence. The miraculous events are not really believable without the evidence, but with the evidence, how can it be questioned?

The effect of knowing that God exists and works in truth and justice, caring for the weak and uplifting the underdog is always a cause for celebration, it causes delight to the listener and Jethro has the correct response, he submits to God, praise him, worships him, recognises him as God.

When we realise who God is and how important it is to be in a relationship with him, the next thing to do is to try to acknowledge him and pay tribute, in other words to lay down your weapons and submit to God, This is what a sacrifice is, this is why we sacrifice, we are saying

"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. <sup>11</sup> Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." <sup>12</sup> 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 a meal with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

<sup>13</sup> The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. <sup>14</sup> 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?"

<sup>15</sup> Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. <sup>16</sup> Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and instructions."

<sup>17</sup> Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> Teach them his

we recognise that you are God and we know that we need to pay tribute to you, to allow you to lead us. This is exactly what Jethro does. The elders join in the meal that results, being invited into the presence of God, Jethro has become elevated through his submission.

In such a huge group of people inevitably there are needs to enable disputes to be settled, why? Because when we are tied up in our own little worlds we become oblivious to the other side of the story and so we need someone outside of our problem to help us resolve these things. Moses recognised the need for some wisdom outside of each dispute – the problem with Disputes is that they quite easily become clan based and can escalate – so you need someone outside of the clan to do this – Moses was perfect for this because he was raised as an Egyptian. It is interesting to compare the accusation at his age 40 – who made you judge over us – to now, God has made him judge.

But Jethro notices this problem (quite often it is people who are new to our Faith and culture that can spot things we can't spot because they are fresh to it and can see simple solutions as they are not yet concerned with the politics of things. Jethro suggests that Moses should share the load with some other impartial elders who can then make wise decisions. Only when those decisions are above the decision making of the elders that they should be referred up to Moses. This is a principle that is today in place – just look at the courts that are running with the story of prorogation of parliament – some courts judged it this way and some that and so it has been referred up to a higher court.

The job of judge to everyone given to Moses is too much. He divides the roles up as Jethro suggests. Now this is interesting. Jethro is telling Moses that he should not keep the understanding of God to himself but should share it with all the people, that may know the way that God has planned for them to live and how they are to behave, and then appoint judges who are to ensure that the understanding of God is kept and followed and used as the rule by which we are to love one another. These judges are to be trustworthy, fear God and men who hate dishonest gain, there's no other qualification given. Nowadays the judges we have have to have a degree in law and all sorts of credentials, a very different set of qualifications. Now it is about knowing

decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.”

<sup>24</sup>Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. <sup>25</sup>He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. <sup>26</sup>They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

<sup>27</sup>Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

**Footnotes:**

- a. **Exodus 18:3** *Gershom* sounds like the Hebrew for *a foreigner there*.
- b. **Exodus 18:4** *Eliezer* means *my God is helper*.

laws, then it was about fearing God.

In v 19 you must be their representative before God – Moses is getting a priestly role – he is being the go between God and men and as such is filling a role like Jesus. With the new testament, the separation between God and man is destroyed through Jesus. When he died on the cross he became the sacrifice that Jethro was trying to make. So we don't need a human priest anymore because Jesus has done the sacrifice – he has completed the work of salvation.

conclusion: jethro recognised a unique story in history, he heard about god's power and went to investigate himself, as a result he found actual witnesses of the event and submitted himself to god, he realised that he was smaller than god, that god was the power of the universe and that he needed to pay tribute – this is exactly what the fear of god is, not worrying that god is going to do something to you, but that he exists and that you can still today submit to him. some lessons beyond this are –

1. how would jethro ever have known unless he had heard about it? it is important that the stories of god are told inside our schools and homes and in art and on tv even by those who don't know god. these stories may encourage people to seek the full story, and then when people do seek the full story they will be filled with both the story and the evidence, and then the full effect of the story will change their lives forever. the story of mooses and jethro is a shadow of the real story of people who are redeemed by the blood of jesus. the incident of jethro submitting to and worshipping god shows he recognised god's power and authority but he didn't have the full picture of god walking among men and being put to death on a cross by them because they hated god in their life. the story jethro got was of God powerfully securing the future of the nation who would one day give birth to his son, and as the bearers of that promise they were blessed with freedom. but now, unlike jethro who had to look forward to a day in which the promise would reach it's fulfilment we look back on a time when the promise was fulfilled – Jesus is the passover lamb that set the Jews free, he is the dry ground under the feet of the jews as they cross over, and he is also the manna that fed them while they wandered around in the desert. and we look back knowing, as Lewis said, that what god has done can be done again. jesus can set you free from your addictions, your slavery just as he did the jews in egypt, he will feed you when you are hungry and when you are trying to cross over from this life to the next, you won't be smothered in the curtain of death but be astonished as you walk across on dry ground.
2. new believers are really very good at seeing the obvious that we don't see and so new believers are always welcome in churches and bible studies and all sorts of places because you can bring something that we've been missing.
3. if you want a good judge in your life, someone who can hear and help with your disputes don't look for a court, look for someone who fears God, doesn't love money and understand his word and you will find a good judge who will help you settle disputes.