

# CHAPTER 18

This chapter is concerning Moses himself, and the affairs of his own family.

- I.** Jethro his father-in-law brings to him his wife and children (v. 1-6).
- II.** Moses entertains his father-in-law with great respect (v. 7), with good discourse (v. 8-11), with a sacrifice and a feast (v. 12).
- III.** Jethro advises him about the management of his business as a judge in Israel, to take inferior judges in to his assistance (v. 13-23), and Moses, after some time, takes his counsel (v. 24-26), and so they part (v. 27).

## ~~EXODUS~~ EXODUS 18:1-6

### JETHRO'S VISIT TO MOSES

This incident may very well be allowed to have happened as it is placed here, before the giving of the law, and not, as some place it, in connection with what is recorded, ~~NUMBERS~~ Numbers 10:11, 29, etc. Sacrifices were offered before; in these mentioned here (v. 12) it is observable that *Jethro* is said to take them, not *Aaron*. And as to Jethro's advising Moses to constitute judges under him, though it is intimate (v. 13) that the occasion of his giving that advice was *on the morrow*, yet it does not follow but that Moses's settlement of that affair might be some time after, when the law was given, as it is placed, ~~DEUTERONOMY~~ Deuteronomy 1:9. It is plain that Jethro himself would not have him make this alteration in the government till he had received instructions from God about it (v. 23), which he did not till some time after. Jethro comes,

**I.** To congratulate the happiness of Israel, and particularly the honour of Moses his son-in-law; and now Jethro thinks himself well paid for all the kindness he had shown to Moses in his distress, and his daughter better matched than he could have expected. Jethro could not but hear what all the country rang of, the glorious appearances of God for his people Israel

(v. 1); and he comes to enquire, and inform himself more fully thereof (see <sup><HB></sup>Psalm 111:2), and to rejoice with them as one that had a true respect both for them and for their God. Though he, as a Midianite, was not to share with them in the promised land, yet he shared with them in the joy of their deliverance. We may thus make the comforts of others our own, by taking pleasure, as God does, in the *prosperity of the righteous*.

**II.** To bring Moses's wife and children to him. It seems, he had sent them back, probably from the inn where his wife's aversion to the circumcision of her son had like to have cost him his life (<sup><RB></sup>Exodus 4:25); fearing lest they should prove a further hindrance, he sent them home to his father-in-law. He foresaw what discouragements he was likely to meet with in the court of Pharaoh, and therefore would not take any with him in his own family. He was of that tribe that said to his father, *I have not known him*, when service was to be done for God, <sup><RB></sup>Deuteronomy 33:9. Thus Christ's disciples, when they were to go upon an expedition not much unlike that of Moses, were to forsake *wife and children*, <sup><RB></sup>Matthew 19:29. But though there might be reason for the separation that was between Moses and his wife for a time, yet they must come together again, as soon as ever they could with any convenience. It is the law of the relation. *You husbands, dwell with your wives*, <sup><RB></sup>1 Peter 3:7. Jethro, we may suppose, was glad of his daughter's company, and fond of her children, yet he would not keep her from her husband, nor them from their father, v. 5, 6. Moses must have his family with him, that while he ruled the church of God he might set a good example of prudence in family-government, <sup><RB></sup>1 Timothy 3:5. Moses had now a great deal both of honour and care put upon him, and it was fit that his wife should be with him to share with him in both. Notice is taken of the significant names of his two sons.

**1.** The eldest was called *Gershom* (v. 3), *a stranger*, Moses designing thereby, not only a memorial of his own condition, but a memorandum to his son of his condition also: for we are all strangers upon earth, as all our fathers were. Moses had a great uncle almost of the same name, *Gershon, a stranger*; for though he was born in Canaan (<sup><HB></sup>Genesis 46:11), yet even there the patriarchs confessed themselves strangers.

**2.** The other he called *Eliezer* (v. 4), *My God a help*, as we translate it; it looks back to his deliverance from Pharaoh, when he made his escape, after the slaying of the Egyptian; but, if this was (as some think) the son that was circumcised at the inn as he was going, I would rather translate it

so as to look forward, which the original will bear, *The Lord is my help, and will deliver me* from the sword of Pharaoh, which he had reason to expect would be drawn against him when he was going to fetch Israel out of bondage. Note, When we are undertaking any difficult service for God and our generation, it is good for us to encourage ourselves in God as our help: he that has delivered does and will deliver.

## ~~EXE~~ EXODUS 18:7-12

### JETHRO'S VISIT TO MOSES

Observe here,

**I.** The kind greeting that took place between Moses and his father-in-law, v. 7. Though Moses was a prophet of the Lord, a great prophet, and king in Jeshurun, yet he showed a very humble respect to his father-in-law. However God in his providence is pleased to advance us, we must make conscience of giving honour to whom honour is due, and never look with disdain upon our poor relations. Those that stand high in the favour of God are not thereby discharged from the duty they owe to men, nor will that justify them in a stately haughty carriage. Moses went out to meet Jethro, did *homage to him, and kissed him*. Religion does not destroy good manners. *They asked each other of their welfare*. Even the kind How-do-you-do's that pass between them are taken notice of, as the expressions and improvements of mutual love and friendship.

**II.** The narrative that Moses gave his father-in-law of the great things God had done for Israel, v. 8. This was one thing Jethro came for, to know more fully and particularly what he had heard the general report of. Note, Conversation concerning *God's wondrous works* is profitable conversation; it is *good, and to the use of edifying*, ~~BASE~~ Psalm 105:2. Compare ~~BASE~~ Psalm 145:11, 12. Asking and telling news, and discoursing of it, are not only an allowable entertainment of conversation, but are capable of being tuned to a very good account, by taking notice of God's providence, and the operations and tendencies of that providence, in all occurrences.

**III.** The impressions this narrative made upon Jethro.

**1.** He congratulated God's Israel: *Jethro rejoiced*, v. 9. He not only rejoiced in the honour done to his son-in-law, but in *all the goodness done to Israel*, v. 9. Note, Public blessings are the joy of public spirits. While the Israelites were themselves murmuring, notwithstanding all God's goodness to them, here was a Midianite rejoicing. This was not the only time that the faith of the Gentiles shamed the unbelief of the Jews; see <sup>4180</sup>Matthew 8:10. Standers-by were more affected with the favours God had shown to Israel than those were that received them.

**2.** He gave the glory to Israel's God (v. 10): "*Blessed be Jehovah*" (for by that name he is now known), "*who hath delivered you, Moses and Aaron, out of the hand of Pharaoh*, so that though he designed your death he could not effect it, and by your ministry has *delivered the people*." Note, Whatever we have the joy of God must have the praise of.

**3.** His faith was hereby confirmed, and he took this occasion to make a solemn profession of it: *Now know I that Jehovah is greater than all gods*, v. 11. Observe,

**(1.)** The matter of his faith: that the God of Israel is greater than all pretenders, all false and counterfeit-deities, that usurp divine honours; he silences them, subdues them, and is too hard for them all, and therefore is himself the only *living and true God*. He is also higher than all princes and potentates (who are called gods), and has both an incontestable authority over them and an irresistible power to control and over-rule them; he manages them all as he pleases, and gets honour upon them, how great soever they are.

**(2.)** The confirmation and improvement of his faith: *Now know I*; he knew it before, but now he knew it better; his faith great up to a full assurance, upon this fresh evidence. Those obstinately shut their eyes against the clearest light who do not know that *the Lord is greater than all gods*.

**(3.)** The ground and reason upon which he built it: *For wherein they dealt proudly*, the magicians, and the idols which the Egyptians worshipped, or Pharaoh and his grandees (they both opposed God and set up in competition with him), *he was above them*. The magicians were baffled, the idols shaken, Pharaoh humbled, his powers broken, and, in spite of all their confederacies, God's Israel was rescued out of their hands. Note, Sooner or later, God will show himself above those that by their proud

dealings contest with him. He that *exalts himself* against God *shall be abased*.

**IV.** The expressions of their joy and thankfulness. They had communion with each other both in a feast and in a sacrifice, v. 12. Jethro, being hearty in Israel's interests, was cheerfully admitted though a Midianite, into fellowship with Moses and the elders of Israel, *forasmuch as he also was a son of Abraham*, though of a younger house.

**1.** They joined in a sacrifice of thanksgiving: *Jethro took burnt offerings for God*, and probably offered them himself, for he was a priest in Midian, and a worshipper of the true God, and the priesthood was not yet settled in Israel. Note, Mutual friendship is sanctified by joint-worship. It is a very good thing for relations and friends, when they come together, to join in the spiritual sacrifice of prayer and praise, as those that meet in Christ the centre of unity.

**2.** They joined in a feast of rejoicing, a feast upon the sacrifice. Moses, upon this occasion, invited his relations and friends to an entertainment in his own tent, a laudable usage among friends, and which Christ himself, not only warranted, but recommended, by his acceptance of such invitations. This was a temperate feast: *They did eat bread*; this bread, we may suppose, was manna. Jethro must see and taste that bread from heaven, and, though a Gentile, is as welcome to it as any Israelite; the Gentiles still are so to Christ the bread of life. It was a feast kept after a godly sort: *They did eat bread before God*, soberly, thankfully, in the fear of God; and their table-talk was such as became saints. Thus we must eat and drink to the glory of God, behaving ourselves at our tables as those who believe that God's eye is upon us.

## ~~CHP3~~ EXODUS 18:13-27

### JETHRO'S ADVICE TO MOSES

Here is,

**I.** The great zeal and industry of Moses as a magistrate.

**1.** Having been employed to redeem Israel out of the house of bondage, herein he is a further type of Christ, that he is employed as a lawgiver and a judge among them.

**(1.)** He was to answer enquiries, to acquaint them with the will of God in doubtful cases, and to explain the laws of God that were already given them, concerning the sabbath, the man, etc., beside the laws of nature, relating both to piety and equity, v. 15. *They came to enquire of God;* and happy it was for them that they had such an oracle to consult: we are ready to wish, many a time, that we had some such certain way of knowing God's mind when we are at a loss what to do. Moses was faithful both to him that appointed him and to those that consulted him, and made them *know the statutes of God and his laws*, v. 16. His business was, not to make laws, but to make known God's laws; his place was but that of a servant.

**(2.)** He was to decide controversies, and determine matters in variance, judging between a man and his fellow, v. 16. And, if the people were as quarrelsome one with another as they were with God, no doubt he had a great many causes brought before him, and the more because their trials put them to no expense, nor was the law costly to them. When a quarrel happened in Egypt, and Moses would have reconciled the contenders, they asked, *Who made thee a prince and a judge?* But now it was past dispute that God had made him one; and they humbly attend him whom they had then proudly rejected.

**2.** Such was the business Moses was called to, and it appears that he did it,

**(1.)** With great consideration, which, some think, is intimated in his posture: he *sat* to judge (v. 13), composed and sedate.

**(2.)** With great condescension to the people, who stood *by him*, v. 14. He was very easy of access; the meanest Israelite was welcome himself to bring his cause before him.

**(3.)** With great constancy and closeness of application.

**[1.]** Though Jethro, his father-in-law, was with him, which might have given him a good pretence for a vacation (he might have adjourned the court for that day, or at least have shortened it), yet he sat, even the next day after his coming, *from morning till evening*. Note, Necessary business must always take place of ceremonious attentions. It is too great a

compliment to our friends to prefer the enjoyment of their company before our duty to God, which ought to be done, while yet the other is not left undone.

[2.] Though Moses was advanced to great honour, yet he did not therefore take his ease and throw upon others the burden of care and business; no, he thought his preferment, instead of discharging him from service, made it more obligatory upon him. Those think of themselves above what is meet who think it below them to do good. It is the honour even of angels themselves to be serviceable.

[3.] Though the people had been provoking to him, and were ready to stone him (~~Exodus~~ Exodus 17:4), yet still he made himself the servant of all. Note, Though others fail in their duty to us, yet we must not therefore neglect ours to them.

[4.] Though he was an old man, yet he kept to his business from morning to night, and made it his meat and drink to do it. God had given him great strength both of body and mind, which enabled him to go through a great deal of work with ease and pleasure; and, for the encouragement of others to spend and be spent in the service of God, it proved that after all his labours his natural force was not diminished. Those that wait on the Lord and his service shall renew their strength.

## II. The great prudence and consideration of Jethro as a friend.

1. He disliked the method that Moses took, and was so free with him as to tell him so, v. 14, 17, 18. He thought it was too much business for Moses to undertake alone, that it would be a prejudice to his health and too great a fatigue to him, and also that it would make the administration of justice tiresome to the people; and therefore he tells him plainly, *It is not good*. Note, There may be over-doing even in well-doing, and therefore our zeal must always be governed by discretion, that our good may not be evil spoken of. Wisdom is profitable to direct, that we may neither content ourselves with less than our duty nor over-task ourselves with that which is beyond our strength.

2. He advised him to such a model of government as would better answer the intention, which was,

(1.) That he should reserve to himself all applications to God (v. 19): *Be thou for them to God-ward*; that was an honour in which it was not fit any

other should share with him, <sup><0126></sup>Numbers 12:6-8. Also whatever concerned the whole congregation in general must pass through his hand, v. 20. But,

(2.) That he should appoint judges in the several tribes and families, who should try causes between man and man, and determine them, which would be done with less noise, and more despatch, than in the general assembly wherein Moses himself presided. Thus they must be governed as a nation by a king as supreme, and inferior magistrates sent and commissioned by him, <sup><0123></sup>1 Peter 2:13, 14. Thus many hands would make light work, causes would be sooner heard, and the people eased by having justice thus brought to their tent-doors. Yet,

(3.) An appeal might lie, if there were just cause for it, from these inferior courts to Moses himself; at least if the judges were themselves at a loss: *Every great matter they shall bring unto thee*, v. 22. Thus that great man would be the more serviceable by being employed only in great matters. Note, Those whose gifts and stations are most eminent may yet be greatly furthered in their work by the assistance of those that are every way their inferiors, whom therefore they should not despise. The head has need of the hands and feet, <sup><4721></sup>1 Corinthians 12:21. Great men should not only study to be useful themselves, but contrive how to make others useful, according as their capacity is. Such is Jethro's advice, by which it appears that though Moses excelled him in prophecy he excelled Moses in politics; yet,

3. He adds two qualifications to his counsel: —

(1.) That great care should be taken in the choice of the persons who should be admitted into this trust (v. 21); they must *be able men*, etc. It was requisite that they should be men of the very best character,

[1.] For judgment and resolution — *able men*, men of good sense, that understood business, and bold men, that would not be daunted by frowns or clamours. Clear heads and stout hearts make good judges.

[2.] For piety and religion — *such as fear God*, as believe there is a God above them, whose eye is upon them, to whom they are accountable, and of whose judgment they stand in awe. Conscientious men, that dare not do a base thing, though they could do it ever so secretly and securely. The



fear of God is that principle which will best fortify a man against all temptations to injustice, <sup><4165></sup>Nehemiah 5:15; <sup><4428></sup>Genesis 42:18.

[3.] For integrity and honesty — *men of truth*, whose word one may take, and whose fidelity one may rely upon, who would not for a world tell a lie, betray a trust, or act an insidious part.

[4.] For noble and generous contempt of worldly wealth — *hating covetousness*, not only not seeking bribes nor aiming to enrich themselves, but abhorring the thought of it; he is fit to be a magistrate, and he alone, who *despiseth the gain of oppressions, and shaketh his hands from the holding of bribes*, <sup><2335></sup>Isaiah 33:15.

(2.) That he should attend God's direction in the case (v. 23): *If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so*. Jethro knew that Moses had a better counsellor than he was, and to his counsel he refers him. Note, Advice must be given with a humble submission to the word and providence of God, which must always overrule.

Now Moses did not despise this advice because it came from one not acquainted, as he was, with the words of God and the visions of the Almighty; but he *hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law*, v. 24. When he came to consider the thing, he saw the reasonableness of what his father-in-law proposed and resolved to put it in practice, which he did soon afterwards, when he had received directions from God in the matter. Note, Those are not so wise as they would be thought to be who think themselves too wise to be counselled; for *a wise man* (one who is truly so) *will hear, and will increase learning*, and not slight good counsel, though given by an inferior. Moses did not leave the election of the magistrates to the people, who had already done enough to prove themselves unfit for such a trust; but he chose them, and appointed them, some for greater, others for less division, the less probably subordinate to the greater. We have reason to value government as a very great mercy, and to thank God for laws and magistrates, so that we are not like *the fishes of the sea, where the greater devour the less*.

**III.** Jethro's return to his own land, v. 27. No doubt he took home with him the improvements he had made in the knowledge of God, and communicated them to his neighbours for their instruction. It is supposed that the Kenites (mentioned in <sup><0516></sup>1 Samuel 15:6) were the posterity of Jethro (compare <sup><0016></sup>Judges 1:16), and they are there taken under special

protection, for the kindness their ancestor here showed to Israel. The good-will shown to God's people, even in the smallest instances, shall in no wise lose its reward, but shall be recompensed, at furthest, in the resurrection.