

Exodus 18 | 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.

Exodus 18 | Jethro's Advice

After the Lord provided water from the Rock in Rephidim the Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites. Moses held his staff as a sign and petition to the God of Heaven whose power gave victory over this enemy nation and restored peace to God's people. The covenant promises of God are playing out in history. Remember what was promised to Abraham when he was first called,

Genesis 12:2-3 | And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:2-3, ESV)

The people of God are being prepared to become a kingdom of Priests. They have inherited the promise to be mediators of blessing to all the families of the earth. But along with this promise is the particular care which God has placed upon his people in a world of hostility. That is why the amalekites, who cursed Israel by their unprovoked attack of the weak, are cursed by God and he uses Israel to militarily enact that curse.

So what is the relationship between Israel and the other nations? Well don't you see its not so straightforward. The nations which curse Israel will be treated as enemies of God and therefore cursed. But the nations who bless Israel will receive the blessing of God. But tucked within this dynamic of blessing and cursing is an ultimate hope for all the families of the earth to be blessed by God's chosen people.

Here is another way to approach this same question. Is God the God of Israel in the way that Baal is the God of Canaan? The canaanites would have prayed for particular protection for their people, and defense from their enemies. That is to bless those who bless them and curse those who curse them. Well he will bless those who bless and curse those who curse Israel, so, yes. God has placed his name upon Israel in a way he has done for no other nation. But is he merely the god of Israel? No he is God of gods. He is God most high. So on the heels of the attack of another nation and the subsequent cursing of that nation we see a glimpse of a nation who would be blessed because the head of this nation is a priest of God and Moses' Father-in-law Jethro. In Jethro we see the nations brought into the worship of God, and bringing gifts with them.

1. No Local Deity

Exodus 18:1 | 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.

We first met Jethro in Exodus 2 when Moses fled from Egypt into Midian, but he is not referred to as Jethro in that chapter but Reuel. Jethro is a title meaning excellence. (Think, your excellency). Reuel is his name which means friend of God. Wandering in the

wilderness Moses meets a friend of God. Actually he first meets his daughters who are being harrassed by rival shepherds who had blocked their access to water. Moses provides water for them and drives the enemies away. This is of course exactly where we are with this second meeting of Jethro in the story. Moses has just provided water and driven away attackers. The daughters bring Moses back to meet the friend of God, and he lives with Reuel and marries his daughter zipporah. We learn of one son they have in this instance named Gershom, which means sojourner.

Jethro hears the news of what God had done for the Hebrews in rescuing them out of Egypt. There is no nation in this region who does not hear of this story. So he determines to go and meet with Moses, bringing with him Moses' wife and children. Here we learn there is another child, Eliezer, which means God is my helper. Jethro comes bringing the help of God.

Exodus 18:7 | 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.

Their greeting reveals their rank. Moses is the one who goes out to meet Jethro. Moses is the one who bows and kisses Jethro. Jethro is the higher ranking man. They greet each other and enquire of their welfare. It is a joyful reunion with a man who was like a father to Moses having lived in his house. There is much news to share, and Moses tells Jethro all that the Lord did to Pharaoh and of the difficulties they encountered in the wilderness and how the Lord delivered them from them all. Jethro rejoiced.

Exodus 18:10-11 | 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."

The gentile nations stand in wonder and awe at what God had done for the people of Israel. He sees that the God of Israel is "greater than all gods." Another way of saying this is that he sees that the God of Israel is God most high. Any other god who would stand against this God is only being arrogant and will be struck down. Now I don't think this is Jethro's conversion, his name is friend of God. Jethro had been a dovettee of the most high God, but here his faith is confirmed and particularized as he sees that the God of Israel is God most high. Do you hear it? The God of Israel is God most high.

Exodus 18:12 | 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.

We see here a sacramental meal with worship of God in sacrifices shared by the elders of Israel and an elder of the nations. God has placed his love upon his people but he is no local deity. All the nations will see that the God of Israel is God most high.

2. Not Good to Be Alone

Exodus 18:13 | The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening.

Exodus 18:17-18 | 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.

Here is the governance structure. Moses will handle it. If there is a problem, which there are always problems, they all get brought to Moses and we see what he says. But Jethro came bringing help. Jethro witnesses the day of Moses handling every issue and immediately sees that this is not good. It is a godlike declaration. Remember when God witnessed Adam alone in the garden on the 6th day, God declares it is not good for man to be alone. Here Jethro declares the same thing for Moses. It is not good for you to be alone.

His recommendation is to do just what God does when he sees that Adam is alone, God makes for Adam Eve who will be Adam's helper. The way God makes for Adam a helper is by dividing Adam into two things, Adam and his rib, forming the rib into Eve and then putting the two things together into one hierarchically ordered union of marriage. This is the way God creates. He breaks things apart and then puts them back together into a more glorious order. Jethro offers this same counsel.

Exodus 18:21 | 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.

The structure is for Moses to select able men, who fear God, and are of strong character. The pillars of this structure are able men with strong character. No amount of structure is able to overcome the weak character of the men who inhabit that structure. There is no church polity, organizational structure, governmental constitution which is able to overcome the weakness of character of the men who inhabit it.

Then Moses is to rank the men according to their skill and character and apportion their area of responsibility accordingly. That they might be over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Now the weight of the nation is distributed across the nation so that it might be carried, rather than crush one man, or be stopped up at one man.

There is much to be said about the wisdom of this subsidiary structure. We have it in our own polity. Within our church we are divided into parishes that we might be put together into a body. Our church is governed by a session of Elders, We are overseen by a regional presbytery who is overseen by a national general assembly. What we see here is that it is not enough for Moses to declare the word of God. He must declare the law of God, but the people must be disciplined, and disciplined to obediently participate in the law of God.

Likewise we see that even a perfect law of God does not speak for itself. It must be applied by wise men to the particularities of life. And the closer they are to those particularities the better. While there is so much to glean from this organizational chart, which is an image of the cosmos. The shape of Mt. Sinai with God at the top.

I want to conclude with by drawing our attention to Jethro once again. At the end of this story Jethro returns to Midian. When he returns as the priest of Midian he must declare, the God of Israel is the God of god's. This is God most high. But what is this for a midianite, we are not Israelites.

After Abraham was given victory by God over an attacking nation in Genesis, a man who hears of this goes to meet Abraham. His name was Melchizedek, which means king of righteousness, and he was king of Salem Which means king of peace. This man was a priest of God most high. Abraham, the covenant head of Israel honors this man giving him tithes and offerings, and Melchizadek blesses God most high. The name of Abraham's apparent heir at that point was a servant named Eliezer.

Melchizedek is extremely mysterious. He is given no lineage and his death is not recorded. Like Jethro. He is a priest of God. Like Jethro. He shows up to the patriarch after a battle like Jethro. And he stands as this representative that the work God is doing in his particular people extends to glorious horizons beyond our imagination. This line of priesthood is the line of priesthood taken up by Jesus Christ. Prince of Peace, King of Righteousness. He is God most high.

He is the one from the Jews by whom all the nations will be blessed and outside of whom will be cursed.