

# EXODUS 18

## DELEGATION AND PARTICIPATION

Last week we saw how Israel was asked to defend itself for the first time since the exodus.

Leading a nation is different from running a state, business or church only in its scope and size. Many times there is an evolution of certain means of doing things as a group, i.e. as a church or other organization grows. By necessity some things must be revisited in order to continue to be effective. And that is where Israel was successful in their first battle, there is now a time of peace and a bit of rest. Now they find themselves back in the real world dealing with the day-to-day issues that all of us have.

We pick up with a visit from Moses' Father-in-Law, Reuel, also referred to as Jethro, which is likely a title and not a proper name.

***1 And Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people—that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt. 2 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, 3 with her two sons, of whom the name of one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land") 4 and the name of the other was Eliezer (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"); 5 and 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 Now he had said to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her."*

*7 So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down, and kissed him. And they asked each other about their well-being, and they went into the tent. 8 And 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 on the way, and how the Lord had delivered them. 9 Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the Lord had done for Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. 10 And 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 who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the Lord is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, He was above them." 12 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God. And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.*

There is a great deal of history and geography wrapped in these verses. First of all, we see once again that Jethro – Moses' father-in-law was the Priest of Midian. He returns Moses' wife and children to him. This means, as we shall see, that Moses' father-in-law had to travel to get to the encampment at Sinai. In verse 5 we read that they were encamped at the mountain of God. This is Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai. It is the same mountain where Moses met God in the burning bush. You may recall how last week I made a case from textual evidence that Mt. Sinai is not in Midian, nor is it in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula. If we jump ahead to the end of the chapter, I

believe the last verse will buttress this idea.

### **Exodus 18:27**

**Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land.**

Midian is in modern day Saudi Arabia, which is well south of Kadesh, one of the places we can identify on a map.

Now that we know WHERE the Midianites were, we need to know WHO the Midianites were. They were a nomadic people.

Midian was a son of Abraham. Isaac, Ishmael and Midian were half-brothers. They each went on to be leaders of brother tribes that spoke the same language and knew of the same God. We can also see this from the book of Job. There we read of Job and his friends having long theological conversations. The land of Uz was also roughly in this same area. Therefore Jethro's worship of God as well as Moses' and the other elders' willingness to burn a sacrifice with him is nothing at which to be alarmed. They all shared a common heritage and a common worldview.

So they all went out to praise and worship God who is definitely worthy of our praise. God got the glory for the victory even though in the last episode the Israelites were involved in the process. The result was a victory. **The glory was all God's and the benefits went to the Israelites.** Once again we see that the will of God glorifies Him and benefits us. Praise the Lord!

Next we will see just how wise Moses' Father-in-Law was.

***13 And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the***

***people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. 14 So when Moses' father- in- law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until 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 difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws."***

Every day Israel wasn't traveling, with the exception of the Sabbath, Moses would sit and judge disputes that came up between the Israelites. If you have ever gone on a trip with children then you know how it is to travel with people that don't always get along. Imagine what it is like to travel with such a large group of people that don't always get along with each other. As you can imagine there were constant disputes. However, Jethro realized that this was way too much for Moses and that it kept him from doing more important things. So he gave Moses some advice. Remember that Jethro, (a title, not a proper name) was a priest and may have been a tribal leader or elder of a village. He would have had to settle disputes also, but on a much smaller scale than Moses.

***17 So Moses' father- in- law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. 18 Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. 19 Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. 20 And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do."***

So Moses was the sole judge for all these people. Wow! I bet that line was longer than the one at the DMV or Wal-Mart! Reuel (Jethro) realized that this would burn Moses out and delay justice for the Israelites. It would also hinder him from interceding with God for the people as well as hinder his teaching them.

It wasn't that judging between the people was beneath Moses or that he wasn't fit for the job, but it was that there were more pressing duties for him to do. We all have to learn to prioritize.

We can see the same scenario and the same solution in the book of Acts.

### **Acts 6:1-7**

**1 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."**

**5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on**

**them.**

**7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.**

It wasn't that "waiting on tables" was beneath the Apostles, but they had more pressing things to do such as study and teach the Word of God. Distributing food to the widows wasn't nearly as specialized so men of good character and full of the Holy Spirit were chosen for the job. The Apostles delegated work to other men.

These were some of the "growing pains" of the early church. If you were reading carefully, you may have noticed that it was Hellenistic widows who had been neglected. These were widows that were either possibly Gentile or more of a Grecian/Jewish culture. There was something of a gulf there due to the difference in culture. We all tend to run in circles. And those circles are defined by our own culture and worldview. When the church began to grow, it began to cross these cultural lines. And, because of these lines, it was natural (though not right) that some people were left out of the process. Therefore, the Apostles met in order to remedy this issue.

If we aren't careful, this very thing can happen within the walls of a church. This is why we need to be on the lookout for those who seem to be on the fringes, as I said, even within our own church. We are to be a welcoming family, not a cliquish country club.

Now let's go back and read the rest of the advice given to Moses.

***21 Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 22 And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you.***

We are told in the NT to bear one another's burdens. That is what Moses was counseled to do here. He was to delegate, but not to delegate to just anyone. Just as it was with the Apostles, Moses was to find God-fearing, Spirit-filled men of character to serve the people. This made everything run faster, smoother and more effectively for everyone. In the context of Exodus, these men were to adjudicate, that is, to render verdicts according to the ways of God. They were to be men of character, not men who would accept bribes or be prone to misdirecting justice. Sadly, there is too much history of injustice in the world.

**Dt. 32: 1 – 9**

**“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak,  
and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.**

**<sup>2</sup> May my teaching drop as the rain,  
my speech distill as the dew,  
like gentle rain upon the tender grass,  
and like showers upon the herb.**

**<sup>3</sup> For I will proclaim the name of the Lord;  
ascribe greatness to our God!**

**<sup>4</sup> “The Rock, his work is perfect,  
for all his ways are justice.**

**A God of faithfulness and without iniquity,**

**just and upright is he.**  
**<sup>5</sup> They have dealt corruptly with him;**  
**they are no longer his children because they are**  
**blemished;**  
**they are a crooked and twisted generation.**  
**<sup>6</sup> Do you thus repay the Lord,**  
**you foolish and senseless people?**  
**Is not he your father, who created you,**  
**who made you and established you?**  
**<sup>7</sup> Remember the days of old;**  
**consider the years of many generations;**  
**ask your father, and he will show you,**  
**your elders, and they will tell you.**  
**<sup>8</sup> When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,**  
**when he divided mankind,**  
**he fixed the borders<sup>[a]</sup> of the peoples**  
**according to the number of the sons of God.<sup>[b]</sup>**  
**<sup>9</sup> But the Lord's portion is his people,**  
**Jacob his allotted heritage. ESV**

I quote these verses from the ESV because they follow the oldest copies of the Hebrew scriptures. These verses refer to Genesis 10 and 11 where God scattered the nations. There were no children of Israel at the time of the scattering of the nations. Abraham had yet to be born. One of the major issues of these leaders of the nations was that they did not rule justly. If you read the Law, you will see that justice, especially to widows and orphans is a major thread running through it. God is just and merciful and therefore we are to be also.

Looking again at the book of Acts, we can see the results of the delegating of the feeding of the widows.



## **Acts 6:7**

**7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.**

The word of God spread and the number of disciples multiplied greatly even to the point that many priests were born again. But what was it that Moses and the Apostles had to have in order for this to work?

They had to have men of good character that were willing to step up to the plate. They had to have men willing to give of their time, talents and their treasury. What made these men want to step up? They were filled with the Spirit. They wanted to be involved in the furtherance of the kingdom of God. This was something worthy their time. They saw this as part of their purpose in life.

Have you ever seen someone that didn't have or didn't know his/ her purpose? They just sort of slide through life. They tend to be the ones that just don't ever seem to grow up. They act like teenagers into there twenties. They are also, in my experience, prone to depression. It is like that in the spiritual arena also.

People get saved but they don't grow to the point where they see anything past salvation and some church attendance as part of their spiritual purpose. Their spiritual growth has been stunted. The result is that they are not as blessed as they could be and the church isn't as blessed as it could be. The stunted Christian fails to accumulate crowns in Heaven, fails to bless and serve others and the church is always short-handed when

it comes to servants such as Sunday school teachers, elders, prayer warriors, clean team and the like. This is even sadder when you see that there are people that would otherwise be qualified to serve.

**They couldn't just pick anyone.** They had to be discerning in the pond in which they had to fish. These positions were important. Not just anyone could fill them. They essentially had to be blameless. Their lives had to mimic that of Jesus or Moses, as it were. They had to be filled with the Spirit AND there had to be visible evidence of that filling.

*19 Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. 20 And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. 21 Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 22 And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. 23 If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace." 24 So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. 25 And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 26 So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small*

*case themselves.*

***27 Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land.***

Moses heeded the advice of his father-in-law. He broke the court system into ever-decreasing sizes. This sped things up while increasing efficiency. But most importantly, it freed Moses to pray, study, teach and allowed others to participate in the plan of God, which, of course, benefits everyone.

This office, elders will evolve throughout the history of Israel. Their duties will be a little different depending on what part of the timeline you are reading. Eventually they, along with others will be instrumental in the coup, under Absalom that temporarily dethrones King David. But for now, they are doing what is required of them.

But this chapter leads us to a question. Have we seriously thought about what it means to participate in the plan of God? What an honor and responsibility that is?

Most of us have probably heard the hymn, "Jesus is calling." Well, Jesus is calling today. **He is calling men and women to participate in His plan beyond the fire insurance. He wants their purpose to be more than church attendance. He wants them to grow spiritually to the point that their lives revolve more around His kingdom than their own.**

Who will step up to the plate? Who is willing to grow? Who is willing to serve? Who is willing to bear the burdens that others have carried alone for some time now?

Until we grow at the personal level it will be hard for the

church to grow at the numerical level. It will be hard for visitors to be served, as they should. It will be hard for us to be served when we are in times of trouble.

When we look at what Jesus did, we see that He gave all in order to obtain our salvation. He gave all in order to serve us. We will see in the next chapters that God gives Israel the Law. And that Law is given to them AFTER they have been brought through the Red Sea and became a new creation, the people of God. So the Law isn't there as a prerequisite for becoming a new creation, but is there because they are now a new creation. Our vocation changes once we are children of God. We don't change in order to be the children of God, but because we are now children of God, we are to be different. We defer to others in service to others because of the new heart of flesh that has been placed in us - because our Lord and Savior has done the same thing for us.

The book of Exodus is about the move from God's apparent absence to his tangible presence. At the beginning of the book the people are in slavery, wondering if their God cares. By the end of the book God is in a tent in the center of the camp. And that move brings change not only to them, but to us also.

