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BIBLE STUDY

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“THE THING THAT THOU DOEST [IS] NOT GOOD”

Exodus 18:1-27

Exodus 18:1 "When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father in law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, [and] that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt;"

Exodus 18:2 "Then Jethro, Moses' father in law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back,"

During their journey to the promised land, the Israelites passed near the home of Moses's father-in-law Jethro. Jethro was a Kenite, part of the Canaanite tribes who descended from Ham of African descent. At that time, the Kenites had settled in the land of Midian. It seems that, Moses left his family with his wife's father, when he went back into Egypt to deliver the people. Sometimes, it is necessary to leave family behind when a dangerous mission is about to be undertaken. This certainly was the case here. The news of Israel's miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage and the Red Sea parting surely had spread. Jethro, like many people of this area who believed in many gods had heard and suddenly realized that the Lord God is the one true God. These miracles just make it very clear that Moses' God is without equal. It was no secret that the God of Moses had fought the battle for His people. That God, Himself, had brought the people out with His mighty hand.

Isaiah 44:6-8

6 Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

7 And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them.

8 Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

Exodus 18:3 "And her two sons; of which the name of the one [was] Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land:"

Exodus 18:4 "And the name of the other [was] Eliezer; for the God of my father, [said he, was] mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh:"

Moses had two sons from his wife Zipporah born to him in Midian. The oldest son was named "Gershom" meaning refugee, or sojourner and the youngest was named "Eliezer" meaning God of help. During Moses' journey back to Egypt with his family, Moses mysteriously became ill.

Zipporah, a non-Hebrew, yet sensing that the Hebrew God was angry with Moses because he had failed to circumcise their son Gershom, circumcised her son herself.

Exodus 4:19-25

19 And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life.

20 And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

21 And the Lord said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go.

22 And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn:

23 And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn.

24 And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him, and sought to kill him.

25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.

Exodus 18:5 "And Jethro, Moses' father in law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God:"

This mount, where Moses was encamped, was Sinai. God had led them with the pillar of fire and smoke to this very spot. Moses had set up camp, and Jethro, Moses' wife, and his two sons had met him. There would have been no trouble finding him, for three million people moving through this land would be hard to hide.

Exodus 18:6 "And he said unto Moses, I thy father in law Jethro am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her."

Exodus 18:7 "And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of [their] welfare; and they came into the tent."

This sort of greeting was not unusual. Moses (in respect for his father-in-law, his wife, and his sons) went out to greet them, when he heard they were near to camp. Moses had not seen his family in quite some time, and you know that he was excited to be able to see them, again. Doing "obeisance" just means that Moses bowed in respect to his father-in-law. This kiss was not like a woman and man kiss but was rather the custom of the land between males who had great respect for each other. They still kiss on the cheek over there today in greeting. They had been very close for the forty years Moses was living in exile. Jethro was very interested in hearing the details on how God delivered His people from Egypt. Moses invited Jethro to come into his quarters, where Moses could privately relate all of this to him.

Exodus 18:8 "And Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, [and] all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and [how] the LORD delivered them."

Exodus 18:9 "And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians."

This was a detailed account of the whole deliverance from Egypt, that we have just read about. Jethro had not been a follower of the Lord in the past (that we know about), but this was convincing testimony. Jethro not only believed Moses, but he was also really excited about the whole thing. The reason Jethro had come to Moses, was because these wonderful stories had filtered across the desert to him. Now that he heard from Moses first-hand of God's exploits, Jethro rejoices greatly, because the stories were true.

Exodus 18:10 "And Jethro said, Blessed [be] the LORD, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians."

Exodus 18:11 "Now I know that the LORD [is] greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly [he was] above them."

This was just praise and thanksgiving from Jethro toward the Lord for saving Moses and the Israelites. In doing this, Jethro was saying, there was a God above all of these false gods I have been worshipping. A God of power and might, who can deliver His people. This was where the scales were removed from his eyes, and he could clearly see that "The Lord He Is God". Just like a person who suddenly realizes and accepts Jesus Christ as Saviour, this was what we were seeing here. Jethro realized the Lord is God. What a realization!

Exodus 18:12 "And Jethro, Moses' father in law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God."

We know Jethro had become a follower of the true God because he brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God. How he knew to do this, we are not told. Perhaps, Moses told him what would be pleasing to God. This was a public display of his acceptance of the Lord as the one true God. Public display of belief is necessary in God's plan. Any sacrifice is at some cost to the one doing it. This was Jethro's way of letting everyone know which side he was on, and the sacrifice showed God that Jethro had forsaken the old gods and accepted the one true God.

Exodus 18:13 "And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening."

At Mount Sinai, they settled for about a year. Possibly, they had already been there for a span of time, before Jethro brought Moses' family. We see, in this Scripture above, that the children of Israel came to Moses, when they had a dispute, so that they might hear the mind of God. Moses, speaking for God, would make decisions between them. These people were so unlearned in the ways of the Lord, that Moses was having to decide even the small problems. It seemed that, there were so many settlements to be made, that the line of people waiting for counsel extended all day long.

Exodus 18:14 "And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What [is] this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?"

Exodus 18:15 "And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to inquire of God:"

Exodus 18:16 "When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make [them] know the statutes of God, and his laws."

Jethro observed how Moses was handling the daunting task of judging the people. From morning until evening, they would stand waiting to bring their disputes before Moses, so that he could judge them, render a decision, and teach them God's statutes. But remember: When Israel left Egypt, there were six-hundred thousand men and that didn't include the women and children! This job we see outlined here, then, was hardly an easy task for Moses to do by himself. And Jethro recognized it. These people were right in coming to Moses. They were fully aware from the ten plagues, from seeing the Red Sea part, from seeing water flow from a Rock, and all the other miracles God had brought through Moses, that God was the answer for everything. They knew if anyone knew the will of God in their camp, it had to be Moses. Moses has been said to be the humblest man who ever lived. They knew him and knew that his judgments were just. What we see Jethro saying here was, you need some help. You see, Moses had already had an encounter with God, and God's statutes and laws were already written on Moses' heart. Moses knew the law because he knew the lawgiver. At this time, God's law had not been written. However, by following the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, men and women of God knew in their hearts right from wrong, because of their close association with God.

Exodus 18:17 "And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest [is] not good."

Exodus 18:18 "Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that [is] with thee: for this thing [is] too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone."

Exodus 18:19 "Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God:"

Jethro made a wise observation: What you're doing is not good. You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people because the task is too heavy for you. You can't do it alone. This tells us that Moses' spiritual mind was right, but his natural mind was wrong. Moses was a good and capable man, but he wasn't God. Both he and the people were going to "wear out" physiologically and psychologically if he didn't get some help, because Moses couldn't do it all and the people couldn't wait forever for justice. We see here that his father-in-law was not just concerned about Moses' body, but realized, also, that Moses could keep them in touch with God, and that Moses needed private time to speak to God for the people. It is a wise man, or woman, who listens to good counsel. Moses could pray to God for his people.

Exodus 18:20 "And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do."

He was telling Moses to delegate authority on lesser matters, so that Moses would have the strength to teach them the ways of God. This is like a church. If the pastor spends all his time cleaning up the church and doing the chores around the church, he doesn't have time to teach the people the way God would have them to live.

Exodus 18:21 "Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place [such] over them, [to be] rulers of thousands, [and] rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:"

Exodus 18:22 "And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, [that] every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear [the burden] with thee."

Exodus 18:23 "If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee [so], then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace."

Jethro encouraged Moses to select men who were God-fearing, trustworthy, and [who hated] dishonest profit. This strongly suggests that the priority in enlisting spiritual leadership should be identifying those who are living in a godly manner and are biblically focused in their dealings. When Paul listed qualifications for church leaders, in fact, the lists consisted primarily of character qualities (1 Timothy 3:1-12; Titus 1:6-9). Moses needed to identify leaders who loved God, knew his law, and submitted to it in their own lives. He was telling Moses to set up local courts, district courts, higher courts, and Moses was the supreme court. This was just another way to delegate authority on minor problems. Only godly men should rule over others. Such a team of leaders could judge the people at all times. Moses could continue to judge every major case, but the leaders could judge every minor case in his stead. That translated to no more waiting in line all day for the people and no more heavy burden of playing judge and teacher having to be carried by Moses alone. This way, Moses could endure, and the people could go home satisfied. This is a reminder to the church that pastors cannot bear the burdens of the church alone. Wise, Word-centered church lay leaders must share the load. By dividing the work in this way, more Christians can be trained to think biblically about life, and they in turn can help their brothers and sisters in Christ to think and live biblically. This is how the body of Christ is built up. It was never intended to be a one-man job. The fact that God appointed 70 Spirit-empowered elders to assist Moses in Numbers 11 does not imply that God set aside these "able men" of Exodus 18. The former were apparently executives and spiritual leaders; the latter were judges."

Exodus 18:24 "So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said."

Exodus 18:25 "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."

Exodus 18:26 "And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves."

Exodus 18:27 "And Moses let his father in law depart; and he went his way into his own land."

Moses listened to his father-in-law's advice and chose leaders to serve in the young nation's new judicial system. Jethro did not demand this; he suggested this if it was okay with Moses and with God. It was a good suggestion. It would be easier on Moses and on the people. A great man is one who hears a good suggestion and heeds it. We see a representative form of government similar to the form of government we have in the U.S. today. God had Moses to accept this system because it would work. Jethro had completed the job, that he was sent to do, and now, he could go home. God uses people who are not even His, sometimes, to carry out a mission for Him. Not only was Moses blessed, but Jethro came to know the Lord, also. Moses' family stayed with him, we can assume, because it said Jethro went home. Then Jethro returned to his home. In this story God used a Gentile man to provide wise counsel for the effective administration of the entire Jewish nation."

QUESTIONS

1. Who was Jethro?
2. What title did he have?
3. What had Jethro heard?
4. What was Moses' wife's name?
5. How many sons did Moses have by her?
6. What were their names?
7. Are Jethro and Reuel the same?
8. What does "Gershom" mean?
9. All the miracles performed leave no doubt about what?
10. What does "Eliezer" mean?
11. Where was Moses camped, when Jethro found him?
12. How had God led these people?
13. What did Moses do to show respect for Jethro?
14. In verse 11, Jethro recognized _____ above all other _____.
15. What ceremony did Jethro do, to let them know for sure how he believed?
16. What was Moses doing all day long?
17. What good suggestion did Jethro make to Moses?
18. Did Moses take the advice?
19. What should Moses' time be devoted to?
20. What was Moses to teach the people?
21. What kind of men was Moses to choose to help?
22. What does this system remind us of in our day?
23. A great man is one, who does what?
24. What were the only problems brought to Moses?
25. Did Jethro continue on with Moses?