

## Exegetical Notes, Exodus 18:1-27

### “Jethro’s Visit”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19329

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

## Exodus 18:1-27

### Verse 1-4

*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 YHWH had brought Israel out of Egypt. After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said “I have become an alien in a foreign,” and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, “My father’s God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh”.*

- “Jethro” is a title, not a name. It is best translated as “his honor or his majesty. Reuel is the proper name of Moses’ father-in-law (see Exodus 2:18). Reuel was the “priest of Midian.” It is hard to determine what this means. He was apparently a local “holy man” who worshiped a variety of local gods including YHWH, but not exclusively. News had reached him of Moses’ success in bringing Israel out of Egypt.
- Apparently, at some point in the story which is not mentioned except here, Moses had sent his wife and his sons away from Egypt and back to Reuel’s household. This was probably done because he thought them to be in great and specific danger from Pharaoh. We do not know the details which caused Moses to do this, but we do know that Moses’ family was received warmly by Reuel.
- The names of Moses’ sons are mentioned here. Gershom was his first-born. The name means “alien” or “stranger.” Eliezer was second born. The name means “God is my helper.” These are the only children born to Moses.

### Verse 5-8

*Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, together with Moses’ sons and wife, came to him in the desert where he was camped near the mountain of God.*

*Jethro had sent word to him, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons.” 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. Moses told his father-in-law about everything YHWH had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel’s sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how YHWH had saved them*

- Reuel is returning his daughter and her family to their proper place as Moses’ family.
- After the public greeting was done, Moses told Reuel everything that had happened to him and to Israel privately. Moses was particular to outline the part YHWH had played in each event.

### **Verse 9-12**

*Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things YHWH had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. He said, “Praise be to YHWH, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that YHWH is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly.” 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 bread with Moses’ father-in-law in the presence of God.*

- The result of the story is Reuel’s confession that YHWH is greater than the other gods. He does not confess that YHWH is the one and only god, just that he is greater than other gods. He then offers sacrifice to YHWH and a party is held to thank YHWH for his keeping of Moses and Israel.

### **Verse 13-16**

*The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. 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?” Moses answered him, “Because the people come to me to seek God’s will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and laws.”*

- Moses sat as judge each day to hear the disputes of the people. As there were over 2 million people in the camp and Moses served in this office alone, it required all of his time every day.
- Observing this, Reuel notes that this job is too big for Moses to do alone and asks why Moses assumes that this must be his responsibility alone.
- Moses' answer is that he must do it for he is the recognized spokesperson for God.

### **Verse 17-23**

*Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. 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. 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. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. 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. 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. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."*

- Reuel made suggestions to Moses about how to handle the situation. First, Moses needed to define his roll. He needed to be the one who stood in intercession for the people before God and he needed to be the one who taught the people the commands of God and how to live according to them. These needed to be Moses' primary, most important, functions. The settling of disputes between the people from morning until night kept Moses from these more important tasks. Second, he needed to appoint helpers who could hear the disputes between the people and decide the cases of lesser severity. This way Moses need be consulted only when the situation was too difficult for the lesser authorities to decide. This would help Moses be more effective as a leader and help the people by providing more immediate access to help in resolving the disputes between them and by teaching them how to live God's way, thus eliminating problems between them before they arose.

### **Verse 24-26**

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

- Moses followed Reuel's advice.

### **Verse 27**

***Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way and Jethro returned to his own country.***

- Reuel did not remain with Israel indefinitely. Eventually, he returned to his own home.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Jethro's Visit*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)