

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Jethro, called the father-in-law of Moses, hearing of the deliverance which God had granted to Israel, Exodus 18:1, took Zipporah and her two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, and brought them to Moses, when the Israelites were encamped near Horeb, Exodus 18:2-5. He sends to Moses, announcing his arrival, Exodus 18:6. Moses goes out to meet him, Exodus 18:7, and gives him a history of God's dealings with the Israelites, Exodus 18:8. Jethro greatly rejoices, and makes striking observations on the power and goodness of God, Exodus 18:9-11. He offers burnt-offerings and sacrifices to Jehovah, and Aaron and all the elders of Israel feast with him, Exodus 18:12. The next day Jethro, observing how much Moses was fatigued by being obliged to sit as judge and hear causes from morning to evening, Exodus 18:13, inquires why he did so, Exodus 18:14. Moses answers, and shows that he is obliged to determine causes between man and man, and to teach them the statutes and laws of God, Exodus 18:15, Exodus 18:16. Jethro finds fault, and counsels him to appoint men who fear God, love truth, and hate covetousness, to be judges over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, to judge and determine in all smaller matters, and refer only the greater and most important to himself, Exodus 18:17-22; and shows that this plan will be advantageous both to himself and to the people, Exodus 18:23. Moses hearkens to the counsel of Jethro, and appoints proper officers over the people, who enter upon their functions, determine all minor causes, and refer only the most difficult to Moses, Exodus 18:24-26. Moses dismisses Jethro, who returns to his own country, Exodus 18:27.

Verse 1

When Jethro, the priest of Midian, etc. - Concerning this person and his several names, See Clarke's note on Exodus 2:15, See Clarke's note on Exodus 2:16, See Clarke's note on Exodus 2:18, See Clarke's note on Exodus 3:1, See Clarke's note on Exodus 4:20, See Clarke's note on Exodus 4:24. Jethro was probably the son of Reuel, the father-in-law of Moses, and consequently the brother-in-law of Moses; for the word אֲבִי (chothen), which we translate father-in-law, in this chapter means simply a relative by marriage. See Clarke's note on Exodus 3:1.

Verse 2

After he had sent her back - Why Zipporah and her two sons returned to Midian, is not certainly known. From the transaction recorded Exodus 4:20, Exodus 4:24, it seems as if she had been alarmed at the danger to which the life of one of her sons had been exposed, and fearing worse evils, left her husband and returned to her father. It is however possible that Moses, foreseeing the troubles to which his wife and children were likely to be exposed had he taken them down to Egypt, sent them back to his father-in-law till it should please God to deliver his people.

Jethro, now finding that God had delivered them, and totally discomfited the Egyptians, their enemies, thought it proper to bring Zipporah and her sons to Moses, while he was in the vicinity of Horeb.

Verse 3

The name of the one was Gershom - See Clarke's note on Exodus 2:22.

Verse 5

Jethro - came with his sons - There are several reasons to induce us to believe that the fact related here is out of its due chronological order, and that Jethro did not come to Moses till the beginning of the second year of the exodus, (see Numbers 10:11), some time after the tabernacle had been erected, and the Hebrew commonwealth established, both in things civil and ecclesiastical. This opinion is founded on the following reasons: -

1. On this verse, where it is said that Jethro came to Moses while he was encamped at the mount of God. Now it appears, from Exodus 19:1, Exodus 19:2, that they were not yet come to Horeb, the mount of God, and that they did not arrive there till the third month after their departure from Egypt; and the transactions with which this account is connected certainly took place in the second month; see Exodus 16:1.

2. Moses, in Deuteronomy 1:6, Deuteronomy 1:9, Deuteronomy 1:10, Deuteronomy 1:12-15, relates that when they were about to depart from Horeb, which was on the 20th day of the second month of the second year from their leaving Egypt, that he then complained that he was not able to bear the burden alone of the government of a people so numerous; and that it was at that time that he established judges and captains over thousands and hundreds and fifties and tens, which appears to be the very transaction recorded in this place; the measure itself being recommended by Jethro, and done in consequence of his advice.

3. From Numbers 10:11, Numbers 10:29, etc., we find that when the cloud was taken up, and the Israelites were about to depart from Horeb, that Moses addressed Hobab, who is supposed to have been the same as Jethro,

and who then was about to return to Midian, his own country, entreating him to stay with them as a guide while they traveled through the wilderness. It therefore seems necessary that the transaction recorded in this chapter should be inserted Numbers 10 between the 10th and 11th verses. Numbers 10:10-11.

4.It has been remarked, that shortly after they had departed from Sinai the dispute took place between Miriam, Aaron, and Moses, concerning the Ethiopian woman Zipporah whom he had married, (see Numbers 12:1, etc.); and this is supposed to have taken place shortly after she had been brought back by Jethro.

5.In the discourse between Moses and Jethro, mentioned in this chapter, we find that Moses speaks of the statutes and laws of the Lord as things already revealed and acknowledged, which necessarily implies that these laws had already been given, (Exodus 18:16), which we know did not take place till several months after the transactions mentioned in the preceding chapters.

6.Jethro offers burnt-offerings and sacrifices to God apparently in that way in which they were commanded in the law. Now the law respecting burnt-offerings was not given till after the transactions mentioned here, unless we refer this chapter to a time posterior to that in which it appears in this place. See Clarke's note on Exodus 18:12.

From all these reasons, but particularly from the two first and the two last, it seems most likely that this chapter stands out of its due chronological order, and therefore I have adjusted the chronology in the margin to the time in which, from the reasons above alleged, I suppose these transactions to have taken place; but the matter is not of much importance, and the reader is at liberty to follow the common opinion. As Moses had in the preceding chapter related the war with Amalek and the curse under which they were laid, he may be supposed to have introduced here the account concerning Jethro the Midianite, to show that he was free from that curse, although the Midianites and the Kenites, the family of Jethro, were as one people, dwelling with the Amalekites. See Judges 1:16; 1 Chronicles 2:55; 1 Samuel 15:6. For although the Kenites were some of those people whose lands God had promised to the descendants of Abraham, (see Genesis 15:18, Genesis 15:19), yet, in consideration of Jethro, the relative of Moses, all of them who submitted to the Hebrews were suffered to live in their own country; the rest are supposed to have taken refuge among the Edomites and Amalekites. See Calmet, Locke, etc.

Verse 6

And he said unto Moses - That is, by a messenger; in consequence of which Moses went out to meet him, as is stated in the next verse, for an interview had not yet taken place. This is supported by reading $\text{x}''\text{x} \text{x}''$ (hinneh), behold, for $\text{x}\text{x} \text{x}^{\text{TM}}$ (ani), I, which is the reading of the Septuagint and Syriac, and several Samaritan MSS.; instead therefore of I, thy father, we should read, Behold thy father, etc. - Kennicott's Remarks.

Verse 7

And did obeisance - $\text{x}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}$ (vaiyishtachu), he bowed himself down, (See Clarke's note on Genesis 17:3, and See Clarke's note on Exodus 4:31); this was the general token of respect. And kissed him; the token of friendship. And they asked each other of their welfare; literally, and they inquired, each man of his neighbor, concerning peace or prosperity; the proof of affectionate intercourse. These three things constitute good breeding and politeness, accompanied with sincerity.

And they came into the tent - Some think that the tabernacle is meant, which it is likely had been erected before this time; see Clarke's note on Exodus 18:5. Moses might have thought proper to take his relative first to the house of God, before he brought him to his own tent.

Verse 9

And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness - Every part of Jethro's conduct proves him to have been a religious man and a true believer. His thanksgiving to Jehovah (Exodus 18:10) is a striking proof of it; he first blesses God for the preservation of Moses, and next for the deliverance of the people from their bondage.

Verse 11

Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods - Some think that Jethro was now converted to the true God; but it is very probable that he enjoyed this blessing before he knew any thing of Moses, for it is not likely that Moses would have entered into an alliance with this family had they been heathens. Jethro no doubt had the true patriarchal religion.

Wherein they dealt proudly - Acting as tyrants over the people of God; enslaving them in the most unprincipled manner, and still purposing more tyrannical acts. He was above them - he showed himself to be infinitely superior to all their gods, by the miracles which he wrought. Various translations have been given of this clause; the above I believe to be the sense.

Verse 12

Jethro - took a burnt-offering - *olah* (olah). Though it be true that in the patriarchal times we read of a burnt-offering, (see Genesis 22:2, etc.), yet we only read of one in the case of Isaac, and therefore, though this offering made by Jethro is not a decisive proof that the law relative to burnt-offerings, etc., had already been given, yet, taken with other circumstances in this account, it is a presumptive evidence that the meeting between Moses and Jethro took place after the erection of tabernacle. See Clarke's note on Exodus 18:5.

Sacrifices for God - *zebachim* (zebachim), slain beasts, as the word generally signifies. We have already seen that sacrifices were instituted by God himself as soon as sin entered into our world; and we see that they were continued and regularly practiced among all the people who had the knowledge of the only true God, from that time until they became a legal establishment. Jethro, who was a priest, (Exodus 2:16), had a right to offer these sacrifices; nor can there be a doubt of his being a worshipper of the true God, for those Kenites, from whom the Rechabites came, were descended from him; 1 Chronicles 2:55. See also Jeremiah 35.

And Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel to eat bread - The burnt-offering was wholly consumed; every part was considered as the Lord's portion, and therefore it was entirely burnt up. The other sacrifices mentioned here were such that, after the blood had been poured out before God, the officers and assistants might feed on the flesh. Thus, in ancient times, contracts were made and covenants sealed; See Clarke's note on Genesis 15:13, etc. It is very likely, therefore, that the sacrifices offered on this occasion, were those on the flesh of which Aaron and the elders of Israel feasted with Jethro.

Before God - Before the tabernacle, where God dwelt; for it is supposed that the tabernacle was now erected. See Clarke's note on Exodus 18:5; and see Deuteronomy 12:5-7, and 1 Chronicles 29:21, 1 Chronicles 29:22, where the same form of speech, before the Lord, is used, and plainly refers to his manifested presence in the tabernacle.

Verse 13

To judge the people - To hear and determine controversies between man and man, and to give them instruction in things appertaining to God.

From the morning unto the evening - Moses was obliged to sit all day, and the people were continually coming and going.

Verse 15

The people come unto me to inquire of God - To know the mind and will of God on the subject of their inquiries. Moses was the mediator between God and the people; and as they believed that all justice and judgment must come from him, therefore they came to Moses to know what God had spoken.

Verse 16

I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws - These words are so very particular that they leave little room for doubt that the law had been given. Such words would scarcely have been used had not the statutes and laws been then in existence. And this is one of the proofs that the transaction mentioned here stands out of its due chronological order; See Clarke's note on Exodus 18:5.

Verse 18

Thou wilt surely wear away - *nabol tibbol* (nabol tibbol), in wearing way, thou wilt wear away - by being thus continually employed, thou wilt soon become finally exhausted. And this people that is with thee; as if he had said, "Many of them are obliged to wait so long for the determination of their suit that their patience must be soon necessarily worn out, as there is no one to hear every cause but thyself."

Verse 19

I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee - Jethro seems to have been a man of great understanding and prudence. His advice to Moses was most appropriate and excellent; and it was probably given under the immediate inspiration of God, for after such sacrificial rites, and public acknowledgment of God, the prophetic spirit might be well expected to descend and rest upon him. God could have showed Moses the propriety and necessity of adopting such measures before, but he chose in this case to help man by man, and in the present instance a permanent basis was laid to consolidate the union of the two families, and prevent all future misunderstandings.

Verse 20

Thou shalt teach them ordinances - *chukkim* (chukkim), all such precepts as relate to the ceremonies of

religion and political economy. And laws, חָקֹתֶיךָ (hattoroth), the instructions relative to the whole system of morality.

And shalt show them the way - דְּרַחֲמָם (eth hadderech), That very Way, that only way, which God himself has revealed, and in which they should walk in order to please him, and get their souls everlastingly saved.

And the work that they must do - For it was not sufficient that they should know their duty both to God and man, but they must Do it too; יַעֲשׂוּהָ (yaasun), they must do it diligently, fervently, effectually; for the paragogic nun deepens and extends the meaning of the verb.

What a very comprehensive form of a preacher's duty does this verse exhibit! 1. He must instruct the people in the nature, use, and importance of the ordinances of religion. 2. He must lay before them the whole moral law, and their obligations to fulfill all its precepts. 3. He must point out to each his particular duty, and what is expected of him in his situation, connections, etc. And, 4. He must set them all their work, and see that they do it. On such a plan as this he will have full opportunity to show the people, 1. Their sin, ignorance, and folly; 2. The pure and holy law which they have broken, and by which they are condemned; 3. The grace of God that bringeth salvation, by which they are to be justified and finally saved; and, 4. The necessity of showing their faith by their works; not only denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, but living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Verse 21

Able men - Persons of wisdom, discernment, judgment, prudence, and fortitude; for who can be a ruler without these qualifications? Such as fear God - Who are truly religious, without which they will feel little concerned either for the bodies or souls of the people.

Men of truth - Honest and true in their own hearts and lives; speaking the truth, and judging according to the truth.

Hating covetousness - Doing all for God's sake, and love to man; laboring to promote the general good; never perverting judgment, or suppressing the testimonies of God, for the love of money or through a base, man-pleasing spirit, but expecting their reward from the mercy of God in the resurrection of the just.

Rulers of thousands, etc. - Millenaries, centurions, quinquagenaries, and decurions; each of these, in all probability, dependent on that officer immediately above himself. So the decurion, or ruler over ten, if he found a matter too hard for him, brought it to the quinquagenary, or ruler of fifty; if, in the course of the exercise of his functions, he found a cause too complicated for him to decide on, he brought it to the centurion, or ruler over a hundred. In like manner the centurion brought his difficult case to the millenary, or ruler over a thousand; the case that was too hard for him to judge, he brought to Moses; and the case that was too hard for Moses, he brought immediately to God. It is likely that each of these classes had a court composed of its own members, in which causes were heard and tried. Some of the rabbins have supposed that there were 600 rulers of thousands, 6000 rulers of hundreds, 12,000 rulers of fifties and 60,000 rulers of tens; making in the whole 78,600 officers. But Josephus says (Antiq., lib. iii., chap. 4) that Moses, by the advice of Jethro, appointed rulers over myriads, and then over thousands; these he divided into five hundreds, and again into hundreds, and into fifties; and appointed rulers over each of these, who divided them into thirties, and at last into twenties and tens; that each of these companies had a chief, who took his name from the number of persons who were under his direction and government. Allowing what Josephus states to be correct, some have supposed that there could not have been less than 129,860 officers in the Israelitish camp. But such computations are either fanciful or absurd. That the people were divided into thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, we know, for the text states it, but we cannot tell precisely how many of such divisions there were, nor, consequently, the number of officers.

Verse 23

If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee - Though the measure was obviously of the utmost importance, and plainly recommended itself by its expediency and necessity; yet Jethro very modestly leaves it to the wisdom of Moses to choose or reject it; and, knowing that in all things his relative was now acting under the immediate direction of God, intimates that no measure can be safely adopted without a positive injunction from God himself. As the counsel was doubtless inspired by the Divine Spirit, we find that it was sanctioned by the same, for Moses acted in every respect according to the advice he had received.

Verse 27

And Moses let his father-in-law depart - But if this be the same transaction with that mentioned Numbers 10:29,

etc., we find that it was with great reluctance that Moses permitted so able a counsellor to leave him; for, having the highest opinion of his judgment, experience, and discretion, he pressed him to stay with them, that he might be instead of eyes to them in the desert. But Jethro chose rather to return to his own country, where probably his family were so settled and circumstanced that they could not be conveniently removed, and it was more his duty to stay with them, to assist them with his counsel and advice, than to travel with the Israelites. Many others might be found that could be eyes to the Hebrews in the desert, but no man could be found capable of being a father to his family, but himself. It is well to labor for the public good, but our own families are the first claimants on our care, attention, and time. He who neglects his own household on pretense of laboring even for the good of the public, has surely denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

It is strange that after this we hear no more of Zipporah! Why is she forgotten? Merely because she was the wife of Moses; for he chose to conduct himself so that to the remotest ages there should be the utmost proofs of his disinterestedness. While multitudes or the families of Israel are celebrated and dignified, his own he writes in the dust. He had no interest but that of God and his people; to promote this, he employed his whole time and his uncommon talents. His body, his soul, his whole life, were a continual offering to God. They were always on the Divine altar; and God had from his creature all the praise, glory, and honor that a creature could possibly give. Like his great antitype, he went about doing good; and God was with him. The zeal of God's house consumed him, for in that house, in all its concerns, we have the testimony of God himself that he was faithful, Hebrews 3:2; and a higher character was never given, nor can be given of any governor, sacred or civil. He made no provision even for his own sons, Gershom and Eliezer; they and their families were incorporated with the Levites, 1 Chronicles 23:14; and had no higher employment than that of taking care of the tabernacle and the tent, Numbers 3:21-26, and merely to serve at the tabernacle and to carry burdens, Numbers 4:24-28. No history, sacred or profane, has been able to produce a complete parallel to the disinterestedness of Moses. This one consideration is sufficient to refute every charge of imposture brought against him and his laws. There never was an imposture in the world (says Dr. Prideaux, Letter to the Deists) that had not the following characters: -

1.It must always have for its end some carnal interest.

2.It can have none but wicked men for its authors.

3.Both of these must necessarily appear in the very contexture of the imposture itself.

4.That it can never be so framed, that it will not contain some palpable falsities, which will discover the falsity of all the rest.

5.That wherever it is first propagated, it must be done by craft and fraud.

6.That when entrusted to many persons, it cannot be long concealed.

1.The keenest-eyed adversary of Moses has never been able to fix on him any carnal interest. No gratification of sensual passions, no accumulation of wealth, no aggrandizement of his family or relatives, no pursuit of worldly honor, has ever been laid to his charge.

2.His life was unspotted, and all his actions the offspring of the purest benevolence.

3.As his own hands were pure, so were the hands of those whom he associated with himself in the work.

4.No palpable falsity has ever been detected in his writings, though they have for their subject the most complicate, abstruse, and difficult topics that ever came under the pen of man.

5.No craft, no fraud, not even what one of his own countrymen thought he might lawfully use, innocent guile, because he had to do with a people greatly degraded and grossly stupid, can be laid to his charge. His conduct was as open as the day; and though continually watched by a people who were ever ready to murmur and rebel, and industrious to find an excuse for their repeated seditious conduct, yet none could be found either in his spirit, private life, or public conduct.

6.None ever came after to say, "We have joined with Moses in a plot, we have feigned a Divine authority and mission, we have succeeded in our innocent imposture, and now the mask may be laid aside." The whole work proved itself so fully to be of God that even the person who might wish to discredit Moses and his mission, could find no ground of this kind to stand on. The ten plagues of Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea, the destruction of the king of Egypt and his immense host, the quails, the rock of Horeb, the supernatural supply by the forty years' manna, the continual miracle of the Sabbath, on which the preceding day's manna kept good, though, if thus kept, it became putrid on any other day, together with the constantly attending supernatural cloud, in its threefold office of a guide by day, a light by night, and a covering from the ardours of the sun, all invincibly proclaim that God brought out this people from Egypt; that Moses was the man of God, chosen by him, and fully accredited in his mission; and that the laws and statutes which he gave were the offspring of the wisdom and goodness of Him who is the Father of Lights, the fountain of truth and justice,

Page 6/6